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Prince Hassan, scholars explore role of mosque

MAFRAQ (Petra) — His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan Tuesday met at Al al Bayt University with the various ministry of Awqaf councils and committees and was briefed on the progress made in the implementation of the comprehensive plan for developing the ministry's work. The plan calls for enhancing the role of the mosques and for rehabilitating preachers and imams, in addition to developing work at the Koran centres with a view to converting them into educational institutions similar to mosques and schools. In an address at the meeting, Prince Hassan stressed the need for upgrading the performance and qualifications of mosque preachers and expressed hope that an agreement would be reached on the role of the mosque in the society. Warning that the Muslim nation was targetted, the Crown Prince said there were campaigns aiming to distort the image of Muslims and relating Islam to violence. Participants in the meeting discussed various issues related to the role of the mosque and inter-faith dialogue. The meeting was attended by His Royal Highness Prince Ghazi Ben Mohammad, the King's cultural secretary, ministry officials, Islamic ulemas and deans of the university's faculties.

'Eid Al Fitr holiday announced

AMMAN (Petra) — All ministries, government departments and public institutions will be closed from Monday, Feb. 19 till Feb. 23 in observance of the 'Eid Al Fitr holiday, according to a communique issued by Prime Minister Abdul Karim Al Kabariti, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, announced. 'Eid Al Fitr, which marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, will fall either on Monday, Feb. 19 or Tuesday, Feb. 20, depending on sighting of the moon of the next lunar month of Shawwal.

Savir leaves, says it is high time to implement bilateral agreements

By Amy Henderson
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — A senior Israeli official left Jordan yesterday following a two-day working visit to the Kingdom, the first by a high-ranking Israeli official since the Kingdom's new government was sworn in and since the two countries concluded their five remaining bilateral accords in mid-January stipulated by the 1994 peace treaty.

During a press briefing before leaving Amman, Uri Savir, director general of the Israeli foreign ministry, said he and Jordanian officials explored possible methods of implementing the bilateral agreements and the joint projects in the Dead Sea, Red Sea and the Jordan Valley.

"We want to explore the implementation of agreements in order to exploit the potential of expanding economic relations," Mr. Savir said. "We also discussed how our relationship can be used in a regional framework and how it relates to the Palestinian Authority."

Mr. Savir expressed disappointment with progress in getting regional and bilateral projects underway since the conclusion of the Middle East and North Africa Economic summit hosted in Amman in October. That event, it was hoped would see the birth of several private sector endeavours that would stimulate the region's precarious economies.

"We now have a certain period of experience with each other and we see the achievements and the problems," he said. "Time has come to put into work the existing economic potential — we did well in project development, but we can do better in attracting private sector involvement. We didn't attract the business people that came to (the summit)."

Jordan and Israel are now holding talks in preparation for the Cairo economic summit, the follow up to the Amman summit, scheduled for the end of this year. But he said both parties should put more emphasis on economic projects and on enhancing trade among Jordan, the Gulf states and Israel.

He said also that Israel was sensitive to Jordan's desire to expand trade with the West Bank, which to date is hindered by Israeli security measures at the Sheikh Hussein and King Hussein crossing points.

"This economic relationship has greater potential," he said, adding that a committee is being established to deal with the issue of trade between the three parties and that both Japan and Germany have expressed an interest in expanding the bridges and installing state of the art facilities for the transport of goods across the bridges.

On the Syrian-Israeli talks front, Mr. Savir, who leads the Israeli delegation, said negotiations between the two sides are moving ahead in areas of normalisation of relations but "we have just started to tackle difficult issues such as security arrangements."

Syria and Israel are scheduled to resume talks at the end of this month, and Mr. Savir said that it was doubtful that Israeli elections.

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Jordan criticises Israel for impeding trade with Palestinians

AMMAN (J.T.) — A Jordanian government official has underlined the need for Israel to remove obstacles that impede trade exchanges between Jordan and the Palestinian self-rule areas.

Basem Awadallah, special advisor to the prime minister on the peace file, called for a tripartite meeting between Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) to discuss common economic issues and facilitate trade exchanges.

Dr. Awadallah, in an interview with Ouds Press published this week, said that the idea of holding a tripartite meeting is to overcome obstacles that impede the flow of Jordanian goods to the Palestinian markets and to enable the three parties to have a common vision on means to stimulate transport and trade activities among them.

Dr. Awadallah said the Israeli-Palestinian economic agreement, had been obstructing the free exchange of goods between Jordan and the West Bank because it tied Palestinian economy more firmly to the Israeli economy.

Part of the solution to the problem, he said, depends on whether the three parties can reach further agreements that would guarantee wider trade and economic exchanges between Palestine on the one hand and Jordan and other countries on the other.

Dr. Awadallah expressed hope that the Israeli government will duly remove obstacles in the path of Jordanian-Palestinian trade.

"The Jordanian government has repeatedly urged Israel to remove these obstacles," Dr. Awadallah said, adding: "Opening Palestinian markets to Jordanian goods will contribute towards loosening the Palestinian economic links with the Jewish state."

Semi-official Palestinian economic surveys submitted to the Jordanian-Palestinian businessmen meeting last June showed that 80 to 90 per cent of the total Palestinian trade is conducted with Israel and the remaining trade is conducted with Jordan, other Arab countries, the European Union and North America.

These figures indicate that the reason for the greater margin of trade with Israel was due to political rather than economic considerations.

The geographic proximity between Jordan and Palestine as well as the similarity in traditions between the two peoples and the agreements signed between the two sides play a key role in facilitating the economic and trade exchanges between Palestine and Jordan.

The Jordanian official disclosed that the delay in signing the Jordanian-Israeli transport agreement until late last month was due to Jordan's keenness to reach agreement with Israel on arranging for transport between Jordan and Palestine.

Dr. Awadallah predicted that trade exchanges between Jordan and Israel will start by mid-March.

He played down fears that trade exchange with

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Muasher unveils far-reaching reforms of press, media sector

By Sa'eda Kilani
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The Ministry of Information will be abolished and press-related laws will be amended to enhance freedoms and protect journalists from persecution, Minister of Information Marwan Muasher said Tuesday.

In a meeting with the president and members of Jordan Press Association (JPA), Dr. Muasher announced a new comprehensive information policy that would result in the creation of an autonomous radio and television entity and would turn the state-owned Petra news agency into a semi-governmental agency.

The government's strategy, aimed at strengthening freedoms but also raising the level of responsibility among media men and women, will first begin with amending the press laws, the 1993 press and publications law in particular.

The law has been highly criticised by international human rights organisations for its long list of items that journalists are prohibited to write on including information on security forces unless authorised; writings that harm national unity; articles or news that shake the confidence in the national currency; articles or information that imply insult to leaders of Arab, Muslim or friendly countries and reports that do not conform with general ethics and societal morals.

Dr. Muasher pledged that the ministry would not be party to legal persecution or harassment of journalists and said that courts will be the final arbiter in all cases filed against journalists.

The JPA temporary law, considered by many journalists as hindering the profession, was also tackled during the meeting. JPA President Suleiman Qudah said the association was working on modifying the law (of 1983) and the amendments introduced to it in 1989. But he regretted that the draft, presented to the Lower House of Parliament in 1990, has not been discussed since.

The House's Judiciary Committee will start discussing the law Saturday. The association declared last week its intention of introducing further amendments to the draft to go in line with the democratic process and the government's directives, Mr. Qudah said.

"I asked the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Abdul Raouf Rawabdeh, to postpone discussions until after Al Fitr feast, but he said it was not possible," Mr. Qudah told the Jordan Times.

Mr. Qudah said the association's council will meet today to discuss the needed amendments to forward its propositions to the House but regretted that this process necessitated more time.

According to Samir Hiyari, head of the JPA Freedoms Committee, the amendments will mainly deal with changing the criteria for JPA membership.

In the current law, to qualify for membership journalists should be on the payroll of a recognised press establishment and should have a certain degree of education coupled with a period of work experience. Freelance journalists, correspondents of foreign agencies and newspapers as well as journalists working in political party newspapers, journalists and anchors at Jordan radio and television, and some columnists are not and could not become members. Non-members are not recognised as journalists, according to the law.

Mr. Qudah said new changes will be made to enable all journalists who wish to join to become members.

Not only Press related laws will be amended, but also major changes in the information milieu will be carried out. An administrative board will preside over the Radio and TV Corporation and the government will have a share in the new establishment. The Press and Publications Department would be restructured and an opinion poll unit will be established, the minister said.

The Jordan News Agency, Petra, will be transformed into a corporation as is the case with international news agencies.

The ministry, before its abolition, will maintain regular contacts with journalists. There will be regular press briefings after every Cabinet meeting and meetings with information minister and other Cabinet members every week and when there is need, the minister stressed.

The need for a code of honour was also discussed at the meeting with the minister pointing to the importance of the journalists' efforts in this domain. Dr. Muasher said he was asked by His Majesty King Hussein on whether journalists, who promised the King in a meeting in December to chart the code in one month, have done so. They did not, he was told.

Also discussed during the meeting was the need for the establishment of a press club and a new premise for the association.

"It was a very positive meeting," Mr. Qudah said.

King to visit Egypt Thursday

AMMAN (J.T.) — His Majesty King Hussein will pay a visit to Cairo on Thursday for talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on bilateral and pan-Arab affairs and issues of common interest, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, announced Tuesday.

Commenting on the visit Minister of Information Marwan Muasher said that the King's visit is very important in view of the developments in the region which require constant consultations and coordination between the two countries.

He said that Jordan's relations with Israel which are governed by a treaty and bilateral agreements can by no means be maintained at the expense of the Kingdom's relations with the Arab states.

Referring to the King's visit to Saudi Arabia, Dr. Muasher said that Jordan is deeply gratified over the visit because he said it had turned a new page in bilateral relations. He said that the visit was marked by openness and frankness and that the two sides were determined to prevent anything from disturbing bilateral relations in the future.

On relations with Kuwait the minister expressed Jordan's hope that further steps would be taken towards improving relations with the emirate and all the Gulf states.

Egyptian Ambassador to Jordan Wjih Hamdi said in a statement to the Al Aswaq daily this week that the visit was in the framework of consultations and coordination between the two sides on Arab, regional and international developments and the peace process.

All issues of common concern will be discussed at the meeting which is expected to yield positive results, Mr. Hamdi said.

According to Mr. Hamdi the two leaders will discuss a date for a meeting of the Higher Joint Jordanian-Egyptian Committee which was put off due to the change of government in Jordan. Also on the agenda are means to stimulate bilateral trade and the sale of Egyptian gas to Jordan in addition to the reduction of tariffs on Jordanian and Egyptian goods arriving through the Suez Canal and Aqaba port.

In addition, he said, the two leaders would discuss the sufferings of the Iraqi people and the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations.

Mr. Hamdi said that Jordan's relations with Egypt were strong and could not be affected by past differences. He said that any attempt to raise contradictions between Egyptian and Jordanian roles in the Middle East would be like fishing in muddy waters because rivalry between the two countries was non-existent. He said that the two countries' relations and roles complement one another.



SCENE FROM OSCAR NOMINEE: Gemma Jones,Emilie Francois and Emma Thompson and (seated) Kate Winslet in a scene from the film "Sense and Sensibility", based on the Jane Austen novel. The film received a nomination for Best Picture, Thompson a nomination for Best Actress and Winslet a nomination for Best Supporting Actress when the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences announced its Oscar nominations Tuesday (Reuters photo)

Water sharing accord initialled in Oslo

By Amy Henderson with news dispatches

AMMAN — Jordanian, Palestinian and Israeli negotiators Monday initialled an agreement on water sharing in Oslo, a Norwegian official announced Tuesday.

The agreement, signed discreetly Tuesday afternoon, is the first regional agreement for water sharing to be accepted since the parties began water negotiations two years ago as part of the multilateral working group on water resources, sponsored by the Norwegian foreign ministry.

It was signed at the expert level by Qusay Qutaishat, head of the Jordan Valley Authority, for Jordan, Riadh Al Khudary for the Palestinian Authority and Avraham Katz-Oz for Israel.

The agreement was intended to outline principles for cooperation on existing supplies and new sources, such as plants for desalinating

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Israel proposes 50-year schedule for return of displaced Palestinians

CAIRO (AFP) — Israel has proposed allowing Palestinians displaced in the 1967 war to return to the West Bank and Gaza at a rate of 4,000 a year, Egyptian officials said Tuesday as Israeli and Arab experts met here to discuss their fate.

Israel estimates the number of displaced Palestinians at 200,000, meaning their repatriation would take half a century to complete at the proposed rate.

"The Israelis divide the displaced Palestinians into eight categories and accept the return of four of those categories for humanitarian reasons, at the rate of 4,000 per year," an Egyptian foreign ministry sources said.

Delegates from Israel, Jordan, Egypt and the Palestinian National Authority began in Cairo Tuesday the seventh session of a committee tasked with arranging the return of "displaced" Palestinians, or those who lost their homes in the June 1967 war.

Previous meetings have been dominated by wrangling over the definition of "displaced" and, therefore, the number who have the right to return under self-rule accords signed by the Jewish state and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO).

The Palestinians put the figure at around 800,000 and say their number has swelled to 1.5 million together with their dependents.

The ministry sources said Israel had agreed to the return of four categories of displaced Palestinians:

— Those who were outside the Palestinian territories at the time of the 1967 war.

— Those who could not renew their Israeli permits for residence in the territories because they were abroad.

— Those who fled the territories in 1967.

— Those who left the West Bank and Gaza in the second half of 1967 to join relatives outside the territories.

But Israel refused the return of those "who committed anti-Israeli attacks or have files with Israelis security services," the source said.

The Jewish state also rules out the return of "those who once lived in East Jerusalem, those who lived on land confiscated for Jewish settlements, and refugees from 1948 who settled in the territories and then fled them in 1967," the source added.

The Palestinians divide the displaced into "three categories totalling approximately 800,000 people," the PLO representative to the Arab League Mohammad Sobeih told AFP.

The three categories are "those who were outside the territories at the time of the 1967 war, those displaced by the war, and those whose residence permits for the West Bank and Gaza have since expired," Mr. Sobeih said.

Palestinians with homes in the West Bank or Gaza must renew their Israeli residence permits every six months or be banned from re-entering the territories.

The committee on the displaced decided on Tuesday to create a sub-committee to examine the sources of each side's statistics, Egyptian Deputy Foreign Minister Badr Hamam told journalists.

Israel seized the West Bank in 1967, along with Arab East Jerusalem which it then annexed. It also captured the Gaza Strip from Egypt.

Khleifat orders release of 259 administrative detainees

AMMAN (J.T.) — Minister of Interior Awad Khleifat issued directives on Tuesday to release 259 detainees who have been held in Jordanian prisons without trial.

In a statement carried by Jordan News Agency, Petra, Dr. Khleifat ordered the release of the administrative detainees, normally detained on administrative governors' orders.

The move, which comes one week before Al Fitr feast, is believed to be part of the new government's pledges to introduce major changes in the field of liberties and human rights.

Last week, Islamic Action Front Deputy Bassam Emoush raised the issue of administrative detainees before the Lower House of Parliament and expressed hopes that the minister of interior would intervene and release the detainees before the end of the Holy Month of Ramadan.

Dr. Khleifat responded by saying that the ministry would form a committee to look into the cases of these prisoners and "God willing, the right decision will soon be taken."

'Syria shuns Iraq's bid for open borders'

CAIRO, Egypt (AP) — Syria has turned down a request from the Iraqi government to reopen its border with Iraq, signalling unwillingness to normalise relations with its Arab rival, Arab diplomats said Tuesday.

The diplomats said the request was made during talks this week in the Syrian capital Damascus between Iraqi and Syrian experts seeking a common strategy in a water dispute with Turkey.

The diplomats, who insisted on anonymity, said Baghdad suggested that Damascus open the border at least for visiting Iraqi technical teams.

They said Syria rejected the idea for fear Iraq would seek a permanent border arrangement.

The Iraqi water experts currently in Damascus

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League: Israel conspiring to stall aid to Palestinians

CAIRO (AFP) — The Arab League accused Israel of asking donor countries to stall in providing economic aid to the Palestinians, in a report released on Tuesday.

"Israel is showing a policy different from its public policy of asking donor countries to provide aid to the Palestinian authority," said the report, presented to journalists by Deputy Secretary General Said Kamal.

Instead, "Israel has asked donor countries in secret to delay in providing this aid," the report said.

In October 1993, donors pledged a $2.4-billion aid package over five years to help the Palestinians establish self-rule, but only a fraction of the amount has been provided since.

The report condemned Israel for "failing to respect accords signed with the Palestinians and failure to stick to timetables" set out in the agreements.

It cited Israel's "stalling in the release of Palestinian prisoners according to schedule."

The Jewish state "has avoided widening the area of the (self-rule) region of Jericho, as agreed by (former Prime Minister) Yitzhak Rabin, and reviewing" an agreement for economic cooperation signed by Israel and the PLO in May 1994.

The report also denounced "continuing statements concerning Jerusalem and the (Jewish) settlements" in the Palestinian territories, whose fate is still to be determined in final status talks in May.

Israel has also stopped work on a promised "security passage" linking the self-rule areas of the West Bank to Gaza, the report said.

Mr. Kamal condemned Israel's latest closure of the West Bank and Gaza, ordered Monday, as an attempt by the Jewish state to establish "military control" over the Palestinian territories. The league "condemns the steps which Israeli occupation forces have taken to close the West Bank and Gaza," he said.

Mr. Kamal added: "The main reason for such an oppressive policy seems to be to give the Palestinian people the feeling that what has been achieved (in self-rule accords) is nothing but a dream." The closure of the territories suggests that Palestinian autonomy "is no more than a temporary stage which will lead Israel once more to imposing military control over Palestinian lands," he said.

"The Palestinian Authority has the responsibility to make swift contact with Arab countries and with the patrons of the peace process to expose these practices," he said.

Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres defended the closure, saying it came after reports that militants were preparing anti-Israeli attacks.



ARAB MAN WITHHELD AT PALESTINIAN DEMO: An Israeli Border policeman holds back Palestinian demonstrators from reaching Rachel's Tomb Tuesday. Dozens of residents protested against Israel's building of a new security wall outside the tomb of the Biblical matriarch which will narrow the road by half (Reuters photo)

Israel plans thousands of new homes on West Bank

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — The Israeli government is planning to build housing for thousands more Jewish settlers on the West Bank, officials said Tuesday, in a move likely to infuriate to Yasser Arafat's self-rule authority.

The housing ministry said the plan was to build 5,500 additional housing units, mostly in "the greater Jerusalem area."

"I will continue building around Jerusalem... and on each parcel of land where construction is possible," Housing Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer said in a statement.

"We are committed to strengthening our capital, which will always be unified, by enlarging the surrounding towns," he said.

Mr. Ben-Eliezer told Israel Radio that he had discussed the plans with Mr. Arafat but did not elaborate on the Palestinian leader's reaction.

The issue of some 140,000 Jewish settlers living in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is one of the most difficult questions facing Israeli and Palestinian negotiators when they begin talks on the final status of the Palestinian territories in May.

There was no immediate reaction from Mr. Arafat's office.

But three other ministers in the Labour Party government protested over the planned settlement expansion, Israel Radio said.

It said Environment Minister Yossi Sarid, Communication Minister Shulamit Aloni and Yossi Beilin, minister in charge of the peace process, complained that the proposals did not correspond to the government's peace policies.

The English-language daily the Jerusalem Post reported Tuesday that the government's inter-ministerial committee on settlements would meet for the first time in nearly a year on Feb. 25 to approve the new building.

Meetings on the issue have been announced on several occasions in the past, only to be cancelled.

Benny Kashriel, mayor of the settlement of Maale Adumim just east of Jerusalem said the committee would consider plans to build 3,000 additional housing units in the town.

Five hundred units are also planned for the Gush Etzion group of settlements south of Bethlehem and 1,000 each for Beitar, also near Bethlehem, and Kyriat Sefer, northwest of Jerusalem, Mr. Kashriel said.

"The government does not want to be accused of halting construction in Greater Jerusalem," he said.

The Labour Party government, under the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, slapped a partial freeze on construction in Jewish settlements when it came to power in 1992, but the move did not cover towns around Jerusalem.

The future of Jerusalem, which both Palestinians and Israelis claim as their capital, looks set to be one of the central themes of the campaign for Israeli elections scheduled for late May or early June.

Benjamin Netanyahu, leader of the right-wing opposition Likud Party, repeatedly accused Labour Prime Minister Shimon Peres of planning to hand the Arab eastern sector of Jerusalem over to Palestinian control in the final status.

Mr. Peres repeated on Monday that Labour remains committed to a unified, Israeli Jerusalem.

49 candidates for Sudanese presidency

KHARTOUM (R) — Forty-nine candidates including the incumbent, Lieutenant-General Omar Hassan Al Bashir, are standing in next month's presidential elections, the chairman of the election commission said.

The chairman, Abdel Moneim Al Zein Al Nahas, said on state television Monday that eight other candidates had been disqualified because they did not meet the necessary conditions.

In the next stage of the election preliminaries, the candidates must present identity cards, proof of good conduct and other documents to the commission by Wednesday, he added.

The list of 49 includes university lecturers and a security adviser to former Prime Minister Sadeq Al Mahdi.

But political sources say General Bashir, who seized power in 1989, is the only candidate with a good chance of winning.

Gen. Bashir was the fourth candidate to join the race. Most of the others joined after the deadline for nominations was extended by three days.

The voting will take place March 6 and 7 and the results will start coming out March 20.

Muslim World's leading personalities flock to Mecca

MECCA, Saudi Arabia (AFP) — From Pakistani leader Benazir Bhutto to the Sultan of Brunei, anyone who is in the Muslim world is in Mecca making a mini pilgrimage during the Holy Month of Ramadan.

The heads of state of many Islamic countries have been flocking to the holy city, using the Omra, the visit to Islam's holiest sites outside of the official pilgrimage period, as a way of meeting other nations' leaders informally.

Saudi Arabia's acting ruler, Crown Prince Abdallah Ibn Abdul Aziz, who like most of the country's leaders spends the last 10 days of Ramadan in Mecca, has been receiving foreign visitors.

King Fahd, who handed temporary control of the kingdom to the crown prince Jan. 1, is too sick to receive visitors since suffering what diplomats said was a blood clot on the brain in November, but is also enjoying his habitual sojourn in the city.

Of the foreign leaders, Ms. Bhutto left on Monday after visiting Mecca and the second holiest city of Medina, following on the heels of Pakistan's President Farooq Leghari.

The Sultan of Brunei, Hassan Balki, one of the richest men in the world, was also carrying out his religious duty, as was Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi's wife Safia, to name but a few.

Last weekend Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and His Majesty King Hussein were in Mecca. Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh and Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri are expected before the end of Ramadan.

The VIPs among the estimated 500,000 foreign pilgrims here for the pilgrimage are housed in luxurious guest palaces near the Kabaa, Islam's most venerated building traditionally held to have been built by Abraham.

Their visits to the grey stone cube, draped with a black curtain, and their other movements in the city are carefully organised by the Saudi authorities.

According to the Koran, all Muslims with sufficient means have to make the full pilgrimage or hajj — which lasts several days and takes place this year at the end of April — at least once in their lifetimes.

But according to a declaration by the Prophet Mohammad, the Omra can count as a pilgrimage if it takes place during Ramadan.

Thus, Mecca, a city banned to non-Muslims, is swamped with thousands of pilgrims hoping to make a quick trip and avoid the intense heat and huge crowds that accompany the hajj. The streets are choked, the hotels and apartment blocks full.

"Since the start of Ramadan, we have organised up to 23 extra flights per day and we have already carried 100,000 people," Mamduh Abdul Qader, director of EgyptAir's office in the nearby city of Jeddah, told AFP.

At least another 50,000 Egyptians have arrived by land or sea, he said. A further 25,000 Turks have arrived since the start of Ramadan as well as 5,000 Iranians, according to diplomats.

On Friday up to two million people, including Saudis, are expected to the city for the Night of Destiny (Lailat Al Qadr), marking the start of the revelation of the Koran, when pious Muslims spend the night worshipping and their wishes can be granted.

Assad meets Troika team

DAMASCUS (AFP) — Syrian President Hafez Al Assad met a European Union delegation on Tuesday to discuss a future association accord between his country and the EU as part of the Middle East peace process, officials said.

The EU Troika delegation, made up of the immediate past, present and future presidents of the 15-nation bloc, was led by Italian Foreign Minister Susanna Agnelli, whose country currently holds the revolving presidency.

She told reporters before going into the meeting that the Troika had come "to find out about developments in the Middle East peace process in order to help progress."

Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq Al Sharaa was also at the meeting, Syrian officials said.

The delegation, which is also due to visit Israel Wednesday, was expected to discuss the "modalities and legal aspects" of an association accord after the landmark European-Mediterranean summit held in November in Barcelona.

"We want Syria to commit itself to an association accord" which would necessitate a speeding up of economic reforms, a diplomat said.

Israeli and Syrian foreign ministers were tempted to sit down for the time together in public for several years at the Barcelona summit, which grouped EU member states with the countries bordering the Mediterranean basin.

The EU is hoping to play a wider role in Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations which are taking place under the auspices of the United States.

Israel and Syria are due to resume their peace negotiations in the United States Feb. 28.

Afghanistan rebel leaders prepare for more fighting

ISLAMABAD (AP) — While Afghanistan's warring rebel leaders were trying to negotiate a peace agreement in Pakistan, back home on the battlefield they were preparing for more fighting, Former Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar Said Tuesday.

Mr. Hekmatyar predicted heavy fighting against Taliban religious fighters in the western city of Herat and against President Burhanuddin Rabbani's troops around the beleaguered Afghan capital of Kabul.

"I can tell you there are preparations for an attack in herat . . . Already there is some fighting there," Mr. Hekmatyar told reporters at the end of peace talks in Pakistan with his rebel rivals.

"There is also preparations for fighting around Kabul," he said.

For the past several days top Afghan rebel leaders, including Mr. Hekmatyar and Afghanistan's powerful Uzbek warlord Rashid Dostum, have been meeting in Pakistan to try to cement an alliance against Mr. Rabbani, their archenemy in Kabul.

Mr. Hekmatyar said the rebel leaders were trying to bring the Taliban religious fighters into the opposition alliance, but so far they have resisted.

Meanwhile in the northern Pakistan city of Peshawar, Mr. Dostum warned Mr. Rabbani against aggression aimed at any of his warring rivals.

"Any attack by Rabbani on any one of the opposition groups will be considered an attack on all the groups," Mr. Dostum said.

Several rebel factions oppose Mr. Rabbani's regime and have independently or in alliances fought to topple the government.

Mr. Dostum said he was in Pakistan at the invitation of the Pakistan government, who sponsored peace talks between rebel leaders.

"These talks have yielded a few positive steps," he said.

Most key opposition groups agreed to form a governing council, or shura, to orchestrate their moves together.

The rebel opposition forces have been governed by a ruling council in the past that in recent months had splintered due to opposing views.

"No individual contacts with Rabbani will be permitted, everything must go through the shura," Mr. Dostum said.

Mr. Dostum, a former general in Afghanistan's erstwhile communist army, also warned the Taliban to drop their ambitions of ruling the country single-handedly.

"No one group can rule Afghanistan," Mr. Dostum said.

Since throwing out the communists in 1992 rival rebel groups have turned their guns on each other in successive bids for power.

Ideologically they all are demanding an Islamic government but they cannot agree on who should participate in this government.

Lebanon's schoolteachers strike

BEIRUT (R) — Some 800,000 Lebanese students were idled on Tuesday when Lebanon's 70,000 schoolteachers staged a one-day strike to make the government meet their pay demands.

The teachers have also threatened a two-day stoppage starting Feb. 27 if the government does not respond. The strike closed public and private schools across Lebanon.

The teachers are demanding the implementation of payscale changes the government agreed in July but has not yet signed into law and help in establishing a "mutual aid" fund for teachers and a social and recreational club.

Some 1,600 teachers at the state-run Lebanese University go on strike on Wednesday to force the government to meet long-standing demands for reinstatement of the university's advisory council and full tenure for contract staff.

But the university teachers called off a planned sit-in outside Prime Minister Rafik Al Hariri's office after the billionaire premier promised to look into some of their demands.

Trade unions and opposition groups have called a general strike and street protests Feb. 29, which they have declared "a national day for defending public freedoms, democracy and daily bread."

The General Labour Confederation (CGTL) is demanding a 76 per cent pay rise for the public and private sectors, a price freeze and doubling the monthly minimum wage of £250,000 ($157).

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PROGRAMME TWO

14:00 The Flintstones
14:30 Speed Racer
14:50 Bill Nye the Science Guy
15:20 Islamic Antiquities in Jordan.
16:00 Drama — Okavango
17:00 Doc. — Planete En Equation
17:30 Serie — Le Dome de la Cote
19:00 Le Journal
19:15 Magazine — Sports Et Musique
19:30 News Headlines
19:35 .. Comedy — Evening Shade
20:00 Doc. — Oriental Rugs
20:25 Hawai Five — O
21:10 Documentry — Horizon Too Big. Too Soon
22:00 News in English
22:25 Drama — Airwolf
23:20 The Silk Road
00:30 Second Thoughts

PRAYER TIMES

04:58 Fajr
06:16 (Sunrise) Duha
11:50 Dhuhr
14:56 'Asr
17:24 Maghreb
18:42 'Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Sweifieh, Tel. 810740

Assemblies of God Church, Tel. 632785.
St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590.
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 637440.
De la Salle Church Tel. 661757
Terrasanets Church Tel: 622366
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 623541.
Anglican Church Tel. 652826.
Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 771331.
Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 775261.
St. Ephraim Church Tel. 771751.
Amman International Church Tel. 652526.
Evangelical Lutheran Church Tel: 824328.
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 845457
The Latter-Day Saints Tel. 654932
Church of Nazarene Tel.675691.
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman
Tel. 811295

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology.

Temperatures are expected to drop with a chance for showers in the northern and central parts of the Kingdom. Clouds will build up at different altitudes and winds becoming southwesterly moderate.

In Aqaba, dusty weather conditions will prevail, winds southerly moderate, and seas rough.

Min./Max. temp.
Amman 6/15
Aqaba 12 / 22
Deserts 5 / 16
Jordan Valley 12 / 21

Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 19 Aqaba 26. Humidity readings: Amman 30 per cent. Aqaba 26 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:
Dr. Bassam Karadsheh 759200
Dr. Mukhles Halasch 819220
Dr. Abdul Wahab Awad ... 846070
Dr. Munther Al Qraini 779959
Firas pharmacy 661912
Ferdows pharmacy 778336
Al Asema pharmacy 637055
Nairoukh pharmacy 623672
Al Salam pharmacy 636730
Yacoub pharmacy 644945
Shmeisani pharmacy 637660
Nairoujh pharmacy 623672
Najib pharmacy 847632

IRBID:
Dr. Ahmad Qanu 281741
Al Quds pharmacy (—).

ZARQA:
Dr. Randa Shahin 995170
Khalifeh pharmacy 985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 637111
Civil Defence Department 661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 630341
Civil Defence Emergency 199
Rescue Police 192. 621111, 637777
Fire Brigade 617101
Blood Bank 775121
Highway Police 843402
Traffic Police 896390
Public Security Department 630321
Hotel Complaints 605800
Price Complaints 661176
Water and Sewerage Complaints 897467
Amman Municipality Complaints 787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121
Overseas Calls 010/230
Central Amman Telephone Repairs 623101
Abdali Telephone Repairs 661101
Jordan Television 773111
Radio Jordan 774111
Water Authority 680100
Jordan Electricity Authority 815615
Electric Power Company 636381
RJ Flight Information 08-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport 08-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
Hussein Medical Centre 813813/332
Khalidi Maternity. J. Amn 6442816
Akileh Maternity. J. Amn. 6424412
Jabal Amman Maternity 642362
Malhas. J. Amman 636140
Pulcstinc. Shmeisani 617171
Shmeisani Hospital 669131
University Hospital 845845
Al-Muasher Hospital 667227/9
The Islamic. Abdali 666127/37
Al-Ahli. Abdali 664164/6
Italian. Al-Muhajreen ... 777101/3
Al-Bashir. J. Ashrafieh 775111/26
Army.&Marks 891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital 6022340/50
Amal Hospital 674155
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 865199

ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital (09)983323
Zarqa National Hospital (09)900560
Ibn Sina Hospital (09)986732
Al Hikma Modern Hospital (09)990990

IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital (02)275555
Greek Catholic Hospital (02)272275
Ibn Al Nafees Hospital (02)247100

AQABA:
Princess Haya Hospital (03)314111

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights (Terminal 1)

08:35 Jeddah (RJ)
08:55 Dubai. Abu Dhabi (RJ)
10:30 Larnaca. Damascus (RJ)
14:45 New York. Amsterdam (RJ)
17:00 Istanbul (RJ)
17:00 Paris (RJ)
17:55 Toronto. Montreal (RJ)
18:00 Frankfurt. Vienna (RJ)
18:05 Rome (RJ)
18:10 Frankfurt. Vienna (RJ)
18:15 Brussels. Geneva (RJ)
18:25 London. Berlin (RJ)
18:50 Casablanca. Madrid (RJ)
23:20 Beirut (RJ)
23:25 Jakarta. Abu Dhabi (add) (RJ)
00:10 Cairo (RJ)

Other Flights (Terminal 2)

09:50 Cairo (MS)
10:30 Jeddah (SV)
12:15 ... Karachi. Abu Dhabi (PK)
13:30 Tunis (TU)
14:20 Algiers (AH)
20:00 Sanaa (IY)
20:10 Beirut (ME)
22:05 Larnaca (CY)
22:45 Athens. Beirut (OA)
23:25 Amsterdam (KL)
23:59 London. Beirut (BA)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights (Marka Airport)

21:25 Aqaba (RW)
22:25 Aqaba (RW)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights (Terminal 1)

09:45 Rome (RJ)
10:15 Amsterdam. New York (RJ)
10:35 Berlin. London (RJ)
11:45 Istanbul (RJ)
19:35 Beirut (RJ)
20:00 Colombo (RJ)
20:05 Riyadh (RJ)
20:10 Cairo (RJ)
20:25 New Delhi (RJ)
20:30 Dhahran (RJ)
21:10 Calcutta. Bangkok (RJ)
21:15 Dubai. Muscat (RJ)
22:45 Sanaa (RJ)

Other Flights (Terminal 2)

07:45 Beirut (ME)
09:15 London (KJ)
10:40 Cairo (MS)
12:00 Jeddah (SV)
13:25 ... Abu Dhabi. Karachi (PK)
14:30 Tunis (TU)
15:20 Shariqah (AH)
21:00 Sanaa (IY)
22:50 Larnaca (CY)
00:25 Amsterdam (KL)
03:00 Beirut. Athens (OA)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights (Marka Airport)

07:00 Aqaba (RW)
07:00 Aqaba (RW)

HIJAZ RAILWAY TRAIN

Dep. Amman ... 8:30 a.m. every Monday
Arr. Damascus 5:30 p.m. every Monday
Dep. Damascus 7:30 a.m. every Sunday
Arr. Amman 5:00 p.m. every Sunday

MARKET PRICES

Upper/lower price in fils per kg.

Apple 700/ 500
Banana 600/600
Banana (Mukammar) 520/520
Banana (imported) 820/650
Cabbage 60 / 40
Carrot 180/100
Cauliflower 180/100
Cucumbers (large) 150/ 100
Cucumbers (small) 270 / 180
Eggplant 200/ 150
Garlic 1000/800
Grape Fruit 220/120
Lemon 400/250
Marrow (large) 130/ 80
Marrow (small) 230 / 120
Onion (green) 140/100
Onion (dry) 210/ 150
Orange 640/500
Pepper (hot) 500 / 400
Pepper (sweet) 540/400
Potato 220/150
Radish 160/100
String Beans 700 / 500
Spanish 140 / 100
Tomato 150/80

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR



HRH Princess Basma Tuesday visits residents of Bushra, Kufur Assad as part of her checking on the progress of the Ramadan Charity Campaign to help the underprivileged families in the Kingdom (Petra photo)

Princess Basma tours Bushra, Kufur Assad; distributes food to 300 needy families

IRBID (Petra) — Checking on the progress of the annual Ramadan Charity Campaign, Her Royal Highness Princess Basma Tuesday visited the towns of Bushra and Kufur Assad in Irbid Governorate where she supervised the distribution of food supplies to 300 needy families from both towns and their surrounding villages.

In meetings in both towns, the Princess said the Queen Alia Fund for Social Development (QAF) will pursue its drive to collect donations for the poor through the end of the holy month of fasting.

She said she will continue to tour rural and poor areas of the country in a show of solidarity with the residents of those areas.

The charity campaign, Princess Basma said, is an embodiment of the noble meanings of fasting during Ramadan and a manifestation of solidarity with the needy. She said she very much appreciated the generous contributions of citizens and institutions.

Irbid Governor Eid Qatarneh and other dignatories, including parliament members of the Irbid district and heads of government departments, were present at the meetings and accompanied Princess Basma on her tours.

During the visit, the head of Il'al village presented Princess Basma with a locally-made silver dagger as a token of appreciation for all her humanitarian efforts and concern for the underprivileged of Jordan.



PRINCESS SARVATH ATTENDS RAMADAN EVENING: **Her Royal Highness Princess Sarvath Tuesday attends a Ramadan function organised by the Young Women's Muslim Association in cooperation with several Arab and Islamic embassies in Amman. The function included art shows, competitions and auctions whose proceeds will benefit projects to rehabilate handicapped persons sponsored by the association. Attending the function along with Princess Sarvath were the wives of the prime minister, the Royal Court chief, ministers and ambassadors (Petra photo)**

NEWS IN BRIEF

King honours Princess Alia

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Hussein Tuesday conferred Al Nahda Medal upon Her Royal Highness Princess Alia in appreciation of her efforts in social and humanitarian fields.

Prince Ra'd attends iftar

MADABA (Petra) — Chief Chamberlain Prince Ra'd Ben Zeid Tuesday attended an iftar hosted by the Jordanian Club for the Special Sports Federation at the Social Services Centre's hall. Prince Ra'd thanked citizens for their support for the handicapped and called for strengthening the role of voluntary societies in serving them.

Muasher, Otoum discuss turning Petra into corporation

AMMAN (Petra) — Information Minister Marwan Muasher Tuesday visited the Jordanian News Agency, Petra, where he met with its Director General Abdullah Otoum and toured the agency's various sections. Mr. Otoum briefed Dr. Muasher on the agency's work, achievements and projects aimed at upgrading the agency's performance. The two also discussed the possibility of transforming Petra into a corporation.

Call issued to watch for new moon

AMMAN (Petra) — The chief islamic justice Monday called on the public to begin watching for the new moon on Sunday evening which would mark the end of Ramadan and the beginning of the month of Shawal in the Hijri calendar. The new moon marks the first day of Eid Al Fitr. If the new moon is spotted it should be reported to the Sharia Court.

WHAT'S GOING ON

TAFILEH CULTURAL DAY

* Cultural Day by Tafileh Cultural Directorate at the Royal Cultural Centre.

FILM

* "Prime Suspect," Part II, at the British Council at 7:00 p.m.

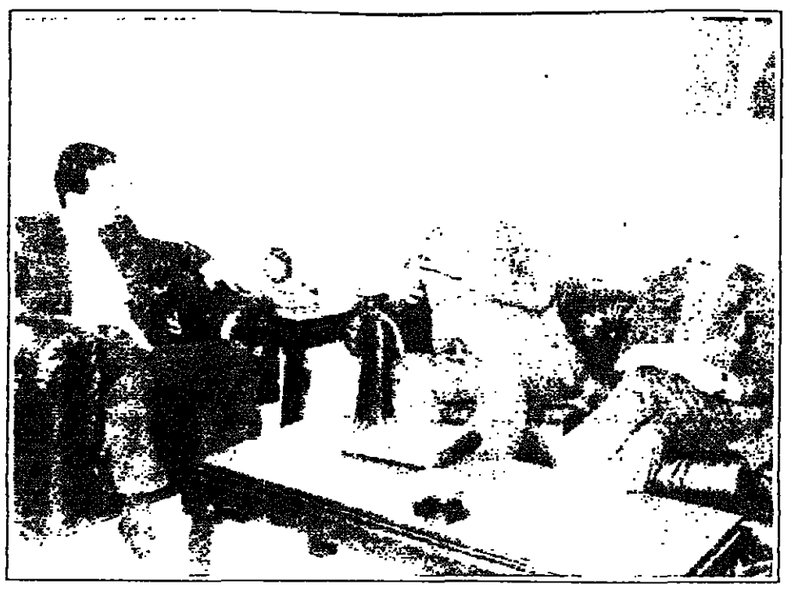
LITERARY EVENING

* Poetry readings by Joseph Huggins, including selective interpretive readings of poems by famous African-American poets at the American Center at 8:00 p.m.

PLAY

"Ramadan Supermarket," (in Arabic) at the Royal Cultural Centre at 8:00 p.m.

Jordan, IATA agree to establish regional office in Amman



Minister of Transport Nasser Lawzi Tuesday meets with visiting IATA Director General Pierre Jeannot (Petra photo)

AMMAN (Petra) — Visiting Director General of the International Air Transport Association (IATA) Pierre Jeannot Tuesday met with Minister of Transport Nasser Lawzi and reviewed several issues pertaining to the air transport industry and the development of air transport in the Middle East.

The IATA chief, who arrived here Monday on a two-day visit to Jordan, discussed with the minister the establishment of an IATA regional office in Amman and preparations for IATA's general conference due to be held in Amman early next year.

Mr. Lawzi expressed Jordan's appreciation to IATA for its decision on the regional office and welcomed the convening of its conference here, expressing Jordan's readiness to provide the necessary facilities to ensure its success.

The two sides agreed to sign a memorandum of understanding on the establishment of IATA's Middle East regional centre in Jordan.

Established in 1945, the Montreal-based IATA strives to promote safe, regular and economic air transport, and foster air commerce and international air transport collaboration.

Ministry study shows drop in numbers of Jordanians working in Arab countries

AMMAN (Petra) — The Ministry of Labour Tuesday released results of a labour market study which showed that 200,000 Jordanians currently are employed in other Arab countries.

According to the study, which measured the number of Jordanians working abroad, reasons for their migration and the situation of the local labour market, 277,000 Jordanians were employed in the Arab countries between 1987 and 1993.

The study said 75,000 Jordanians are employed in non-Arab countries including European states, the U.S., Canada and Australia.

According to the ministry's secretary general, Saleh Tarawneh, unemployment in Jordan is the major reason for such emigration.

Mr. Tarawneh added that the numbers are continuing to rise with the graduation of increasing numbers of school and college students each year.

According to the study, there were at least 285,338 non-Jordanian workers in Jordan at the end of 1995.

Earlier this week Minister of Labour Abdul Hafez Shakhanbeh said he asked concerned government authorities to stop issuing residency permits to non-Jordanian workers unless they have acquired work permits in advance, approved by his ministry.

The ministry is working on measures to help achieve balance in the labour market.

Those measures include limiting the numbers of non-Jordanian workers in the Kingdom.

According to the ministry's study, 34.29 per cent of the non-Jordanians are employed in the services sector, such as in hotels and restaurants.

It said non-Jordanian workers in domestic service account for 27.85 per cent of that sector, and those working in bakeries were estimated at 2.6 per cent of the total number of bakery employees.

At the end of 1995, 95,164 non-Jordanian workers had complied with a Ministry of Labour deadline and obtained the work permits required to continue to stay in Jordan.

Shbeilat's case being dealt with according to law, Dughmi says after meeting at JBA

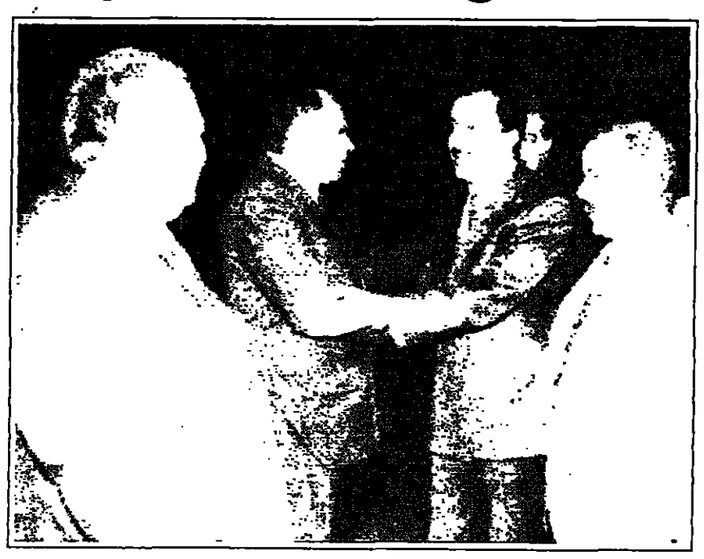
AMMAN (Petra) — Minister of Justice Abdul Karim Dughmi Tuesday said the case of Jordan Engineers Association (JEA) President Leith Shbeilat, currently under detention awaiting trial for allegedly slandering Their Majesties King Hussein and Queen Noor and HRH Crown Prince Hassan, is being dealt with by court according to Jordanian law.

Following a meeting with Vice-President of the Jordan Bar Association (JBA) Ziad Khasawneh in the presence of Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti and Former JBA President Kamal Nasser who is now minister of social development, Mr. Dughmi said there are no violations of regular court procedures in the case.

Mr. Dughmi said the prime minister's meeting with Mr. Khasawneh "was a translation of the royal letter of designation" to Mr. Kabariti's government, stressing that the government is serious in being open to associations and hearing all views. He said the govenment will hear and study all the JBA's demands.

Mr. Khasawneh, meanwhile, stressed the need to amend the association's bylaws and finding means to reduce unemployment among lawyers.

He also highlight the importance of safeguarding democracy and protecting public freedoms.



Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti Tuesday visits the Jordan Bar Association where he is welcomed by JBA officials (Petra photo)

JEA elections

On Friday, about 12,600 engineers are expected to cast ballots in the elections of the Jordanian Engineers Association (JEA), and association sources said that incumbent president Leith Shubeilat stands a good chance of retaining his seat.

The engineers, expected to vote in Amman, Irbid, Karak, Ma'an, Zarqa and Aqaba will elect a president, vice president and council members.

In all, eight candidates are runing for president, six for vice president and 17 for seats on the JEA council.

JEA sources said that Shbeilat has a good chance to win the majority of votes as president of the association.

Among those running for the vice presidency are members of the Islamic Action Front, and according to the JEA law the council has the power to elect the vice president as president if the latter's seat remains vacant.

The association groups nearly 30 000 registered engineers but only those who had paid their subscription fees to the assocation for 1996 and the previous years will be able to vote in the coming election .Accoording to a Professional Association Complex source the elections will be held if there is a quorum otherwise another round will be held next Friday.

The enginers were given 15 days between Jan 26 and Feb 8 to pay their subscription fees to the assocation 's secretariat in order to be come eligible for voting.

Engineer Mansour Shammout has been appointed head of a higher central committee for the elections which will be convened in Amman.

Jordan criticises Israel

(Continued from page 1)

Israel would negatively affect Jordan's economy and enable Israel to dominate the Jordanian markets.

"Jordan has achieved very positive gains through its trade agreement with Israel," said Dr. Awadallah adding that certain Jordanian commodities have been exempted of customs duty by 100 per cent, and others by 50 per cent. He said that Jordan in exchange has offered Israel exemptions not exceeding 10 per cent. He said demand on Israeli goods in Jordan would depend on several factors including price and quality.

Dr. Awadallah said the Jordan-Israel peace treaty would reflect positively on the Jordanian economy.

"Before the treaty we were not able to discuss regional projects and were not able to conduct Jordanian-Palestinian trade exchanges or carry out development projects in the Jordan Rift Valley or open avenues for regional cooperation, or new markets or stimulate tourism or embark on major regional telecommunications schemes."

He said the demarcation of the common border with Israel and the restoration of Jordanian territory and water rights were major achievements of the treaty.

In implementation of the transport agreement between Jordan and Israel direct flights between the two sides will start in April at the rate of five weekly flights from each side, said Awadallah adding that technical arrangements have been finalised for the commencement of the flights.

Dr. Awadallah referred to a study on the construction of a new international airport in Aqaba saying that the airport would benefit Jordan as well as Israel. He said that the study is expected to be finalised in May adding that the airport will bear the name of the Peace Airport and will offer services to all countries.

Dr. Awadallah said that the Jordanian economy now has a chance for growth "especially through the on-going economic reform programme, the government's declared policy of giving the private sector a greater role." He also said that Jordan was bound to reach an economic, cultural and security partnership agreement with the European Union which will entail among other things the creation of a free trade zone.

Jordan has applied for membership in the World Trade Organisation and the Kingdom is holding talks with neighbouring Arab countries with the purpose of reaching agreement on creating free trade zones, he said. Such endeavour will contribute towards creating equitable developmental and economic bases among the Arab countries, he added.

Dr. Awadallah emphasised the importance of activating the role of the private sector in the coming stage and said that the private sector was expected to contribute more in the construction, investments and production.

He said the government "is determined to promote investments through creating the right climate for investors from Jordan and abroad by enacting further laws to achieve that purpose."

He recalled that the parliament has endorsed a package of laws on investment promotion, ending the economic boycott with Israel and the income tax.

As troops mass, China blames Taiwan for tension

BEIJING (R) — Tensions between Taiwan and China stepped up Tuesday as Taipei ordered its military on high alert in preparation for war games by mainland troops which are seen brushing closer to the island than ever before.

In Beijing, China repeated charges that Taiwan was to blame for recent tensions between the two.

Taiwan said its armed forces were put on heightened alert even though a People's Liberation Army deployment along China's east coast, put at some 150,000 troops, was smaller than some reports had predicted.

"In order to ensure that people can pass the (Chinese New Year) holiday period in peace, units from the three branches of the armed forces are strengthening alertness," the Taiwan Defence Ministry said.

Taiwan would guard against any provocation by the "enemy", a ministry statement said.

"The strength of the combined forces does not exceed 150,000 so the rumour of 400,000 troops is an exaggeration," Taiwan Defence Minister Chiang Chung-Ling was quoted by a spokesman as saying in Taipei.

Mr. Chiang said China had airlifted troops into provinces near Taiwan and increased air strength by 88 warplanes to a total of 226 at 11 airports along the south east coast.

Taiwanese authorities would not venture a date for the exercises — seen in Taiwan as intimidation before a March 23 presidential election — but Mr. Chiang said they were likely to brush closer to the island than any before.

Beijing has regarded Taiwan as a renegade province since 1949 when the Nationalists, defeated by the Communists in a civil war, took refuge on the island.

Decades of military hostilities gave way in the 1980s to economic and cultural detente and broad unofficial contacts, but tensions have soared in recent months with China alleging that Taipei was seeking to make its de facto independence formal.

China vows to use force if Taiwan declares independence.

In Beijing, Foreign Ministry spokesman Shen Guofang restated China's goal of re-unifying Taiwan with the mainland and said efforts by Taiwan's Nationalists to win international recognition were the "root cause" of tensions.

"The most urgent thing for the Taiwan authorities to do is to give up attempts to create 'two Chinas' or 'one China, one Taiwan' and abandon their splittist policies," Mr. Shen said.

Mr. Shen played down a new Taiwan cabinet council formed to soothe political and economic jitters and boost public spirit before the island's first direct presidential election.

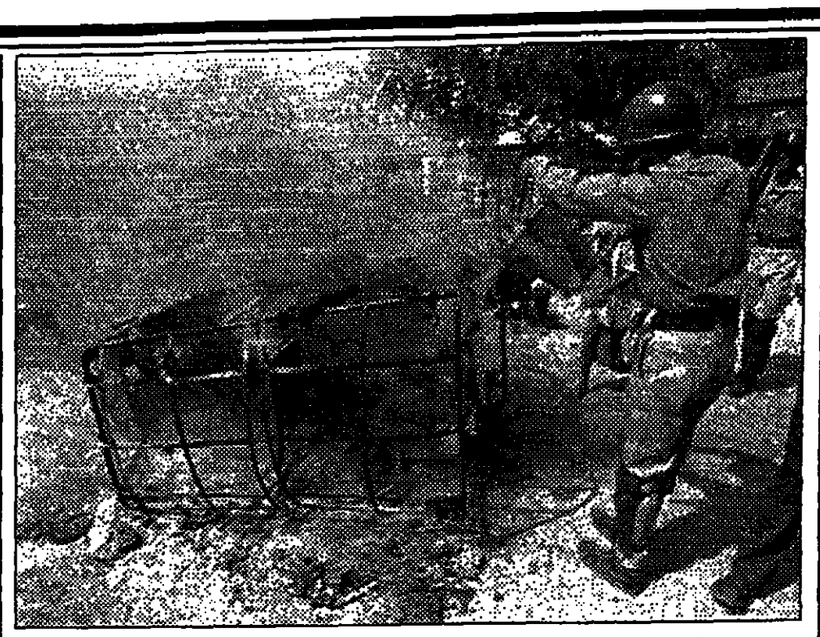
"It is China's hope that the group will carry out a directive to end those splittist activities," Mr. Shen said.

Beijing has refused to discuss its military exercises other than to say manoeuvres are a normal part of military training.

China pointedly declined to confirm or deny a New York Times report in January saying plans were completed for limited missile strikes on Taiwan after the March election, fuelling suspicion that the report was leaked to sway public opinion away from President Lee Teng-Hui, the campaign frontrunner.

China mounted a blitz of live-fire war games and missile tests in the months before Taiwan's December elections, a display credited by some with paring the Nationalists' parliamentary majority to a knife-edge 51 per cent.

Beijing has attacked President Lee relentlessly, accusing him Tuesday of playing "children's games" with the lives of Taiwan's 21 million people by pursuing independence while paying lip service to unification, which remains Taipei's avowed goal.



A policeman pours water onto a burning rickshaw after it was set alight by demonstrating opposition activists in Dhaka Tuesday. The country's opposition parties have called for a three-day shutdown to protest the upcoming elections and violent protests continue in the capital (Reuter photo)

Bangladesh state employees refuse to work in elections

DHAKA (R) — Bangladesh civil servants said Tuesday they would refuse to carry out polling duties during this week's general election, a fresh headache for the government as it faces a rising tide of resistance to the vote.

The bureaucrats said they feared for their lives. "We have not come to work to die. So we can't perform duties assigned during the elections," they said in a joint statement.

Bangladesh's main opposition parties are boycotting Thursday's vote and have mounted an increasingly strident campaign against the government of Begum Khaleda Zia, the country's first woman prime minister.

Mrs. Khaleda is standing firm, insisting that voting will go ahead. Opposition efforts to undermine the election include a day-long blockade of transport services Tuesday and a 48-hour general strike due to start Wednesday.

Police and officials said at least 16 people had been killed and nearly 500 wounded in clashes between election supporters and opponents since Feb. 1.

Thousands of state employees, including senior officials, demonstrated inside Dhaka's main government secretariat Tuesday to underline their refusal to perform election duties.

"Even the chief election commissioner doesn't have a guarantee of his personal safety. Then how can anyone ensure our safety?" One official asked.

Their decision two days before the election left the government with an unexpected problem.

Witnesses said troops patrolled the secretariat compound during the civil servants' demonstration but did not intervene.

Authorities plan to deploy 20,000 police and troops in and around Dhaka, a city of nine million, to try to prevent further violence during the elections.

"Troops cannot protect us everywhere," one official said referring to attacks on poll officials across the country.

Several election officials were attacked at Narayanganj, a Dhaka suburb, Monday, witnesses said. Some of them were forced to jump into a swamp in order to escape.

At least a dozen election offices have been burned in the past week, police said.

An unidentified caller telephoned the Election Commission Tuesday warning that it might be bombed, reliable sources said.

"EC officials were all very scared following the call and they ran to hide. All doors at the commission building were immediately shut," one source said.

Tuesday's transport blockade stranded millions of people. Most trains and ferries were halted. Airport officials said flights were delayed.

Opposition activists near Narsingdi, 55 kilometres from the capital Dhaka, removed sleepers from railway lines and set them on fire, police said.

Other protesters barricaded highways near Chittagong and in dozens of districts across the country.

Opposition leaders say they are boycotting the poll because it will be rigged to ensure victory for Mrs. Khaleda's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).



President Bill Clinton meets with Ulster Unionist Party leader David Trimble (left) at the White House Tuesday. Mr. Trimble suggested that Washington should clamp down on visas for Sinn Fein leaders and fundraising in the United States following the Feb. 9 bomb blast in London (Reuter photo)

Dublin presses for Dayton-style talks to save N. Ireland peace process

DUBLIN (R) — Ireland is sticking by its plan to convene Bosnian-style "proximity talks" to salvage the Northern Ireland peace process from the wreckage of last Friday's London IRA bomb, Irish officials said Tuesday.

They said Dublin was pressing its idea of getting all Northern Ireland's feuding political parties under one roof for an intensive round of talks under British and Irish mediation to keep the process alive — an idea first proposed last week.

The officials played down British media reports that Irish Prime Minister John Bruton had dropped his opposition to British plans to call elections in Northern Ireland to get all sides talking in a non-executive assembly.

"It doesn't mean it's game set and match for holding elections," one official said. "But elections leading to all-party talks is a goal."

British insistence on calling elections rather than all-party negotiations on a lasting Northern Ireland settlement is thought to have been the spur that made the Irish Republican Army (IRA) end a 17-month ceasefire and bomb London.

The officials said Mr. Bruton saw the holding of talks using the Dayton, Ohio format that clinched a Bosnian peace pact as a way of getting all sides to agree on what purpose an election would serve and how it would be carried out.

The Irish prime minister was expected to publicly air the proposal when he addresses parliament Tuesday afternoon and responds to a parallel speech by British Prime Minister John Major Monday.

Mr. Bruton was bitterly critical of London Saturday for sticking to its election plan but the Irish government has welcomed Britain's determination to keep the peace process alive and ease strained relations across the Irish Sea.

Irish Foreign Minister Dick Spring first aired his proposal for Dayton-style talks last week and flew to Washington to get U.S. President Bill Clinton to throw his weight behind it and persuade the London government to accept the idea.

Officials said the notion found favour in Washington and Mr. Spring was flying back from the United States optimistic that he could break months of peace process deadlock with the idea when the IRA bombed Canary Wharf killing two people.

Britain was cool to the notion, calling it premature, but both governments are now keenly aware of the need to arrest any further backsliding into the 25-year Northern Ireland war that killed 3,200 people, the officials said.

The two governments have refused to talk to Sinn Fein, the IRA's political wing, until it condemns the IRA attack. Northern Ireland Unionists, who want the province to stay British, have refused any dealings with the party.

Sinn Fein too has said the idea of elections falls short of negotiations to change 25 years of Unionist domination in Northern Ireland and is a British betrayal of promises to hold all-party talks.

The officials said Sinn Fein had to accept the idea of elections to keep the peace process alive and welcomed Mr. Major's linkage between elections and future all-party talks.

"You have to get acceptance for elections from the (Irish) nationalists," said one official. "It's a stand-off at the moment and a very dangerous one."

The peace process has been mired in deadlock for months over Britain's demand, rejected by Sinn Fein, that the IRA disarm to earn its spokesmen a place at the conference table.

In Washington, President Clinton Monday met a top Northern Irish Protestant leader but made no decision on his demand that the United States cut off visas and fund raising for Sinn Fein after Friday's London bombing.

Ulster Unionist Party leader David Trimble urged Mr. Clinton to put pressure on Sinn Fein, the Irish Republican Army's political wing, following the the IRA bombing which killed two people and injured more than 100.

"What I think the administration should be doing is finding ways of putting pressure on Sinn Fein and the IRA to urge upon them a return to a credible ceasefire and the ending of violence," Mr. Trimble told reporters after the meeting.

But a White House source said the administration had not taken any decision on visas or fundraising and suggested it was unlikely to lean on Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams.

"We have no regrets about the support that we have given Gerry Adams, or the support that we will continue to give Mr. Adams in the search for a lasting peace in Northern Ireland," said the source, who declined to be named.

Mr. Clinton himself, asked during a photo opportunity whether Mr. Adams could still be trusted following the bombing, took pains not to criticise the Sinn Fein leader.

"I'm going to do what I think is best to try to promote peace there," Mr. Clinton said shortly before he met Mr. Trimble.

EU: Burundi totally opposed to foreign intervention

NAIROBI (AFP) — Burundian authorities are totally against the despatch of a foreign force to their war-torn central African nation, a European Union (EU) team stated Tuesday after a day-long visit there.

Marcello Ricovero, the Italian representative of an EU troika which went to Burundi, told a press conference that "there is a very clear indication stated by both the president and the prime minister that they are totally against the U.N. Resolution 1040, as far as the contingency plans are concerned".

The U.N. Security Council last month approved a series of measures aimed at stemming violence between extremists of Burundi's Hutu majority and the Tutsi minority, which is claiming about 30 lives a day.

The resolution could in the longer term involve the deployment of an international peacekeeping force to operate out of neighbouring Zaire.

Mr. Ricoveri, who was accompanied to Burundi by representatives from Ireland and Spain, said his team had discussed the forthcoming appointment of an EU special envoy to Burundi, Aldo Ajello.

"The EU remains the main donor as far as humanitarian emergency aid is concerned," he added.

"We would like to switch from humanitarian aid to reconstruction and rehabilitation aid, but we are prevented from doing so by the situation in the country."

Mr. Ayello will "start a very important round of negotiations" with Burundian authorities, Mr. Ricoveri stated. The country, where the army is Tutsi-dominated, has a fragile coalition government which is seeking to prevent conflict on the scale of the 1994 civil war in neighbouring Rwanda, in which 500,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were massacred by Hutu extremists before a Tutsi-led rebel army seized power in July that year.

With regard to an international force, Mr. Ricoveri said that "the international community should be very careful in adopting these contingency plans, because the Burundian authorities, and Burundian public opinion, are totally against".

Police kill 2 activists in Karachi

KARACHI, Pakistan (R) — Police said Tuesday they had shot dead two activists of the ethnic Mohajir National Movement (MQM) in an overnight gunbattle in Karachi, one of the venues for World Cup Cricket.

Unidentified gunmen killed three people in separate incidents in the southern Pakistani port Monday, they said.

The latest killings occurred as Karachi prepares to host three World Cup Cricket matches, the first of which is Pakistan against South Africa on Feb. 29. Organisers have said they are confident that security for the games can be assured.

Police said Abrar Ahmed, 28, and Siraj Ahmed, 26, had been killed in an overnight shootout with police in District West's Orangi town after a raid on a suspected MQM hideout. Two activists were arrested, they said.

However, an MQM spokesperson said paramilitary rangers had arrested all four men and later shot two of them dead in cold blood. The MQM had been unable to ascertain the whereabouts of the other two from the authorities, she added.

The MQM says more than 40 of its activists have been victims of extra-judicial killings by the security forces this year and says 130 were killed in similar circumstances in 1995.

The government denies any extra-judicial killings by the security forces, which are waging a deadly conflict with the MQM. More than 100 people were killed in Karachi in January.

The MQM has denied reports that it was planning to disrupt the World Cup, but says it reserves the right to call for protests if the security forces kill and torture its militants.

Nearly 2,000 people were killed in ethnic, political and sectarian violence in Karachi, Pakistan's biggest city, in 1995.

Japan rules out force over disputed isles

TOKYO (R) — Japan said Tuesday that it has ruled out the use of force to settle the issue of disputed islands, and aims to discuss its latest territorial row with South Korea when the atmosphere is calmer.

"Japan has never intended to use force and does not intend to do so over such disputes," Foreign Ministry spokesman Hiroshi Hashimoto told a news conference. "We will wait for a quieter atmosphere to take up the issue."

Last week, Japan lodged a protest with South Korea over its moves to improve docking facilities on one of the two Takeshima Islands, which lie midway between the two countries in the Sea of Japan.

South Korea calls the islands Tokdo and has claimed them since gaining independence from Japan in 1945, and South Korean Border Guards have been stationed there since 1954.

Japan has claimed them since 1905, at a time when they were a group of desolate, uninhabited rocks.

South Korea's renewed construction work appears to have been triggered by Japan's recent moves to declare a 200-mile exclusive economic zone around its shores. They are located about 700 kilometres northwest of Tokyo and about 450 kilometres east of Seoul in the Sea of Japan.

The islands have a total area of only 250 square metres, but they are surrounded by rich fishing grounds and the seabed is believed to contain mineral deposits.

Over the weekend, the row escalated when the South Korean government said a group of Japanese lawmakers, who had been planning to visit South Korea this month, would not be welcome in Seoul because some of them had said they will take up the Takeshima issue. The parliamentarians called off their trip.

Mr. Hashimoto also said South Korea has announced it will stage a navy-air force exercise around Takeshima, but could not confirm the exact date or location.

Since the end of World War II, Japan has not extended a military presence to back up claims over disputed islands. But it regularly sends Coast Guard cutters to patrol such areas.

Japan's constitution specifically bans the country from using military force to settle international disputes.

Unlike a similar row over the disputed Kurile Islands which are occupied by Russia, Tokyo and Seoul have not agreed to take up the Takeshima issue in a formal bilateral framework, Mr. Hashimoto said. The four Kurile Islands, claimed by both Russia and Japan, lie northeast of Japan's main island Hokkaido.

There is also no plan for Japan to bring the Takeshima issue to the International Court of Justice or to ask the United States or any other third country to mediate the dispute.

"This is solely a matter for the two countries," Mr. Hashimoto said.

Meanwhile, he confirmed media reports that a Chinese oil-drilling ship had been sighted off the Senkaku Islands, a group of islands in the East China Sea disputed by China, Japan and Taiwan. The Chinese ship No.3 Kandang, he said, was seen last week by a patrolling Japanese Coast Guard cutter.

Police arrest Torah thiefs

NEW YORK (R) — Police have charged a man with stealing at least $100,000 of sacred religious objects, including up to 18 Torahs, from New York City synagogues, the New York Times reported Tuesday. Police said they do not know what happened to the Torahs, which were stolen from temples and synagogues in Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens over the last four years. Second-hand Torahs sell well both in the United States and abroad, the newspaper reported. Even without their silver breastplates and crowns, Torahs, which take a year to write by hand, are valued at $8,000 to $15,000. Police said they caught the suspected burglar, Richard Stevens, 48, of Brooklyn, New York with burglary tools at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel and he confessed to previous thefts of religious articles. The suspect led police to his alleged fence, Restore-All Silversmiths of Manhattan.

130,000 marshmallows fly in giant 'snowball' fight

SKOKIE, Ill. (R) — It was originally going to be the world's largest snowball fight, but when the weather did not cooperate Monday with this Chicago suburb's plans, marshmallows were quickly substituted. Thousands of children tossed or gnawed on 130,000 marshmallows poured from 2,500 bags of the Sugary Confection. Organisers said they were aiming for a spot in the Guinness Book of World Records as the children and a smattering of intrepid adults engaged in what was billed as the world's largest marshmallow fight. Guinness officials said they were interested in documenting the stunt. Skokie Park officials provided all participants with hot chocolate — topped with marshmallows.

Thai premier slams uncontrollable talk show

BANGKOK (AFP) — Thai Prime Minister Banharn Silpa-Archa Tuesday defended a decision to cancel a popular television talk show, saying the programme was "uncontrollable". Mr. Banharn's administration last week ordered Different Perspectives dropped from a government-run television channel, drawing criticism from the public and the opposition over the action. Mr. Banharn told reporters after the weekly cabinet meeting Tuesday that the minister who oversees the Public Relations Department had summoned the talk show host three times to discuss programme content, without success. The host was acting as though he were "a law unto himself," he said. Mr. Banharn denied the decision had anything to do with his appearance on the programme during the general election campaign last June, after which he complained he had been treated unfairly during questioning. "I have nothing to do with this, and I am never angry at anyone for more than two months," he said. Piyanath Vatcharaporn, minister attached to the premier's office, ordered the programme scrapped, saying the moderator was biased against the government. The popular talk show had its last broadcast this weekend after airing programmes through successive governments for five years.



Aerial views shows a giant boulder above a road tunnel before (left) and after the second blast (right) for rescue works in Furubira on Japan's northern island of Hokkaido. Rescue workers failed to blast the giant boulder into the sea over the tunnel in which 20 people have been trapped since the morning of Feb. 10 (Reuter photo)

3rd attempt to remove slab in Japan tunnel fails

TOKYO (R) — Rescue workers failed Tuesday in a fresh attempt to blast away a giant boulder to reach 20 people trapped in a collapsed road tunnel in northern Japan for more than three days.

In a reaction to the disaster, authorities also ordered Tuesday a nationwide inspection of all road tunnels to ensure there was no repetition of the tragedy.

"No one could predict such a disaster would happen," Transport Minister Yoshiyuki Kamei told a news conference in ordering inspections of all 7,000 road tunnels in the country.

"More investigations and precaution are needed (regarding tunnels)," he added.

The latest dynamite explosion, as with two previous efforts, chipped away only a small part of the 50,000-tonne slab which crashed through the roof of the tunnel Saturday morning.

Rescue workers, who are convinced the tactic is the only way to get to the victims in their icy trap, said they planned to set off further explosions until the slab was blasted off the tunnel roof.

The rock slab has trapped 19 people in a bus and a motorist in a car since Saturday morning.

When it fell, a 40-metre stretch of the roof crashed down from just inside one of the entrances of the 1,086-metre Toyohama Tunnel, about 50 kilometres northwest of Sapporo, capital of the island of Hokkaido.

There has been no sign of life from the trapped vehicles since the accident, and some rescue officials have said they fear the victims died instantly, crushed under rock.

Two explosions, each of about 220 kilogrammes of dynamite, set off by rescue workers Sunday and Monday failed to remove the boulder.

Relatives have waited round-the-clock at the rescue scene in freezing weather for word of their loved ones. They have agreed the blasting should go on until the fate of those trapped is beyond doubt.

The only other ways to reach those trapped would be to drill a hole from the top of the tunnel, which would take at least a week, or to dig by hand through the rubble surrounding the vehicles, which could take up to 60 days.

Dozens of tonnes of debris poured into the tunnel when the giant tear-shaped rock slab slid off the side of a mountain overlooking the tunnel and speared into its roof.

Geology experts say landslides are a constant hazard on Hokkaido, an island regularly shaken by earthquakes and blanketed by snow for up to six months of the year.

They say earth tremors open small cracks in rocks and ice can form in the cracks, widening them and leading to regular rock falls.

N. Korean leader's first wife said seeking asylum

SEOUL (R) — The first wife of North Korea's shadowy leader Kim Jong-Il is seeking asylum after disappearing from a Western country, a South Korean government official said Tuesday.

The official, who asked not to be identified, declined to give details on Sung Hye-Rim's location or where she wanted to go, but did not rule out the possibility of her coming to South Korea.

Ms. Sung, 58, is the first wife of Kim Jong-Il and the mother of his eldest son, Jong-Nam, but has not lived with the North Korean leader for many years, the official said. She is not legally divorced from Mr. Kim.

"Kim's wife and three others accompanying her are seeking asylum. We have been looking into this case but we cannot give details," the official told Reuters.

But he added: "I cannot rule out the possibility of them defecting to South Korea."



This is a file photo of Sung Hye-Rim in her 20s, identified by South Korean officials as the first wife of North Korea's uncrowned leader Kim Jong-Il and the mother of his eldest son, Jong-Nam. Ms. Sung is known to be seeking asylum via a Western country along with her elder sister, niece and an attendant (Reuter photo)

Three others seeking asylum are Ms. Sung's elder sister, Sung Hey-Rang, her niece Lee Nam-Ok and an attendant. The four were last seen on Jan. 20 in a Swiss villa, he said.

"As far as I know, Sung had many problems in North Korea," the official said.

South Korea's influential Chosun Ilbo newspaper said the four arrived in Switzerland after leaving an apartment in Moscow, where they had lived since 1983 for treatment of Ms. Sung's illness.

A spokesman of the Agency for National Security Planning, formerly known as the Korea Central Intelligence Agency, said he understood the four were in hiding.

"We are greatly concerned about their safety as their escape has been reported by the media."

Chosun Ilbo said it had arranged telephone conversations between Sung Hey-Rang in Moscow and her only son Lee Han-Young, who has lived in South Korea since defecting in 1982.

The daily quoted the elder Sung as telling her son by telephone that the four planned to leave Moscow for a third country in late January.

"We can meet. We can meet. I'm trying hard to make it happen...Wait please," Chosun Ilbo quoted Ms. Sung as telling Mr. Lee.

It said Sung Hye-Rim, a former actress, was married before she met Mr. Kim Jong-Il in 1967. Mr. Kim forced her to divorce and marry him. She gave birth to Kim Jong-Nam in 1971.

North Korea-watchers in Seoul say Mr. Kim, heir to the late North Korean President Kim Il-Sung, has had two other wives — one his former typist and the other a dancer.

Experts on North Korea say Kim Jong-Il is in full control of North Korea but has yet to be formally confirmed in the two key posts his father held — general secretary of the Communist Party and state president.

Stalinist North Korea, hit by the worst flooding in a century, was reported to be on the brink of famine and the Pyongyang government has appealed for foreign aid.

The two Koreas are still technically at war since the 1950-53 Korean War.

Meanwhile defectors from North Korea said Tuesday many North Korean overseas missions are financially strapped and some diplomats smuggle goods to meet expenses.

"North Korean diplomats cannot carry out diplomatic activities because of a lack of expenses," said Hyun Sung-Il, who defected to South Korea last month while serving as a third secretary in the North Korean embassy in Zambia.

"We could not live without side jobs and most other (North Korean) missions overseas are known to be in a similar situation," Mr. Hyun told a news conference in Seoul.

The 37-year-old defector said those "jobs" included smuggling of water buffalo horns and ivory into foreign countries, including China and South East Asian nations.

He said the North Korean government had sent only $30,000 for all expenses to its Lusaka embassy, including wages, between November 1993 until he defected last month.

"(North Korean) overseas missions cannot request any additional funds. If an embassy asks the government for more expenses" it could be closed down, Mr. Hyun said.

Seoul officials said North Korea closed down 12 overseas missions last year, bringing the number of its diplomatic offices to only 69. Pyongyang now has ambassadorial relations with 132 foreign countries.

Choi Soo-Bong, 36, Mr. Hyun's wife who defected to Seoul two weeks before her husband's defection, told the news conference that families of North Korean diplomats in African countries were living in "miserable and shameful" conditions.

"I bought underwear and other clothes in second-hand markets in Zambia," she said. "I had to pretend I was Chinese because I was so ashamed."

She said the embassy had paid $250 a month to her husband until last August, after which the payments stopped.

Dole, Buchanan and Alexander move on to New Hampshire

Des Moines, Iowa (R) — Bob Dole headed for New Hampshire Tuesday with his Republican front-runner crown still in place but wobbling after a strong challenge in the Iowa caucuses from Pat Buchanan.

Sen. Dole, the Senate majority leader who has been considered the man to beat for the Republican presidential nomination since he announced last year, won his party's first major preference vote of the 1996 campaign Monday as expected.

But it was a thin mandate that he took with him to the next battleground — New Hampshire, which holds the country's first presidential primary next Tuesday.

With 98 per cent of the vote counted in Iowa, Sen. Dole got 26 per cent — far lower than the 37.4 per cent he won in the same primary in 1988 and the lowest winning total ever in the state.

His support Monday was just three percentage points ahead of Mr. Buchanan, the fiery conservative commentator whose appeal to the religious right was a prime factor in his strong showing.

The 57-year-old Buchanan — who captured three million Republican primary votes in a 1992 challenge to former President George Bush — said Monday's vote left him "hard on the heels of Bob Dole. The victory is tremendous friends, and we are going to win this Republican nomination."

but no matter the margin of victory, Sen. Dole did win.

"Tonight was the first step on our road to return conservative common sense to the White House," Sen. Dole told cheering supporters. The 72-year-old senator promised them "another victory and another victory and another victory" in later contests, starting with New Hampshire.



Republican presidential frontrunner, Senator Bob Dole, gives a thumbs up as he leaves a caucus site Tuesday prior to the beginning of the Iowa Caucuses. Early projections predict Sen. Dole to easily win the the first major step in capturing the Republican nomination for president (Reuter photo)

Sen. Dole won Iowa eight years ago but his campaign fell apart in little more than a week. He lost to Vice President George Bush in New Hampshire and never recovered.

Also getting a boost out of Iowa was former Tennessee Governor Lamar Alexander, who finished third with 18 per cent.

"Let the future begin," said Mr. Alexander, saying he picked up strength because voters rejected the mud-slinging advertising that dominated the contest.

In limbo was publisher Steve Forbes, who spent millions of his own money to make a media smash in Iowa but ended up with only 10 per cent of the vote after he publicly criticised the Christian Coalition, a major political force in the state.

Mr. Forbes' "flat tax" message, however, is likely to play better in anti-tax New Hampshire, where a big spending television campaign may bring better results than in a caucus state like Iowa which puts a high priority on organisation.

Left in the dust after Iowa was Texas Sen. Phil Gramm, who finished fifth with 9 per cent. Sen. Gramm was going on to New Hampshire but most observers expected him to withdraw soon.

Behind Sen. Gramm and out of the picture were talk show host Alan Keyes with 8 per cent, Indiana Sen. Richard Lugar with 4 and Illinois manufacturer Morry Taylor, with just 1 per cent. Congressman Bob Dorman of California got less than 1 per cent.

One other winner in Iowa was President Bill Clinton, who was unopposed in the Democratic caucuses.

CNN said its analysis of the vote showed Mr. Buchanan's strength came from religious conservatives who favoured him over Sen. Dole two-to-one. It said conservatives of all types went more heavily for Mr. Buchanan than Sen. Dole and that Mr. Alexander's strength came from voters who thought the 55-year-old former education secretary had the best chance of beating Mr. Clinton.

Analysts said the result was a tepid endorsement for Sen. Dole, running for the presidency for the third time in a neighbouring farming state which had been expected to hand him a convincing victory.

"It shows how miserably weak Dole is. He emerges as a limping frontrunner, not a sprinting frontrunner," said Allan Lichtman of the American University in Washington D.C.

Keating gets good news from poll

CANBERRA (R) — An opinion poll showing a sharp narrowing of the Australian opposition's lead came as the first good news in the March 2 election campaign for Labour Prime Minister Paul Keating Tuesday.

The Morgan poll in the Bulletin newsmagazine showed Mr. Keating had reined in Liberal-National opposition leader John Howard's lead to just 3.5 percentage points, compared with 7.5 previously.

"Support for Labour surged in the second week of the election campaign, stripping support away from the (opposition) coalition and independents and other parties," the poll said.

But two other polls conducted on the weekend flatly disagreed with the Morgan poll, showing the gap widened last week to nine or 14 points.

Until now Mr. Keating has had nothing but bad news from the polls, with little sign that his costly election promises were wooing voters. Opinion polls have shown an underlying opposition lead of more than six percentage points since Mr. Howard took over the leadership of the opposition, which has lost five consecutive elections since 1983.

The Morgan poll also showed voters greatly preferred Mr. Keating to Mr. Howard as prime minister — he led with 51 per cent support to Mr. Howard's 42 per cent.

The average Australian does not find the notoriously arrogant Keating likeable but Labour, believing he is nonetheless highly respected, is campaigning under the slogan "leadership".

Australia's conservative opposition, striving to win the March 2 general election, said Tuesday it would consider fitting submarines with cruise missiles to enhance the nation's long-range strike force.

Denying that Asian neighbours should be alarmed at the prospect, opposition leader John Howard said Australia must retain the strategic capability provided by its ageing fleet of F-111 bombers.

"The coalition is determined to maintain a viable and effective strike force," Mr. Howard said in his defence policy document, released Tuesday.

"The F-111 represents a formidable capability which must be retained," added Mr. Howard.

If voted into government, the coalition will enhance the "strategic strike capability through ongoing support for the F-111 fleet and a review of a replacement capability", he said.

As a replacement, Australia's new Collins class submarines, regarded as one of the most effective non-nuclear submarines in the world, might get non-nuclear cruise missiles, he added.

Australia's F-111s, bought in the 1960s, are still the most powerful strike aircraft outside the United States and former Soviet Union, analysts have said.

The aircraft enable Australia to hit distant, heavily defended targets — flying fast and low on approach — and the fleet has at times caused friction in South East Asia.

The Labour government decided in 1992 to expand the fleet to 36 aircraft from its original 24 by buying spare aircraft from the United States, prompting Indonesia's envoy at the time to question Australia's desire for regional security co-operation.

Australia and Indonesia signed a historic security agreement in December, the latest move in Prime Minister Paul Keating's four-year push to integrate his country with Asia.

But Mr. Howard said Tuesday that Asia should not worry about his plans and that Australia had to make its own decisions.

"I wouldn't expect any concern in the region at all," he said after releasing the document.

"All of our experience over the decades has taught us that we must ultimately take our own counsel, always recognise where fruitful relationships can be built they ought to be built, but in the end we have to look to our own resources and our own resilience."

He reaffirmed his support in principle of Australia's security pact with Indonesia, but said his government would discuss the deal with Jakarta soon after the election.

He also invited South East Asian nations to launch a joint crackdown on piracy, possibly using Australian warships.

"There is a need to develop co-operative bilateral frameworks to secure peaceful passage for shipping in Australian and South East Asian waters," Mr. Howard said.

The F-111s are supposed to serve until after 2010, but analysts say there is no affordable replacement except submarines fitted with Cruise missiles.

The opposition shied away from calls by the defence lobby to modify Australia's tanker aircraft to serve the F-111s, which would extend their already long reach.

Australia's existing tankers cannot refuel F-111s.

Mr. Howard also announced he would cut the defence-force bureaucracy and deploy more combat troops, giving the regular army a sixth battalion.

Zairean forces deploy around Rwandan refugee camp

KIBUMBA CAMP, Zaire (R) — Zairean commandos and guards deployed around the largest Rwandan refugee camp in eastern Zaire Tuesday and refugees said they would ignore the Zairean campaign to pressure them to return home voluntarily.

Commandos with rifles slung over their shoulders moved to a road on the edge of Kibumba Camp as thousands of refugees stood and climbed to hills in the camp to see what they were doing.

Armed border guards also took positions around the sprawling camp. They were concentrated in places but in others were hundreds of metres apart along the seven kilometre perimeter.

Refugees vowed to stay put despite the Zairean plan to encourage them to leave and to close down progressively some 40 camps for the one million Rwandan refugees in eastern Zaire who came here after the 1994 genocide which many are blamed for.

"The Zaireans have been talking about this operation for weeks now but nothing will happen. Our leaders told us to remain passive. We will stay here and UNHCR (the U.N. refugee agency) will continue to feed us," refugee Aloys Bidineza told Reuters.

Hundreds of children perched on volcanic rocks and men stood on roadsides, some clutching radios to their ears and watching.

No violence was reported by late morning 10 hours after the operation involving a few hundred troops and Border Guards began. Other troops of a 1,500-strong Zairean camp contingent set up last year held key junctions inside Kibumba as usual.

Refugees said they would stay calm but refused to go home.

The refugees are from the Hutu majority and fled in 1994 during civil war and the genocide of up to a million Tutsis and Hutu moderates butchered by Hutu troops, militiamen and mobs.

Rwanda's government says it will screen all male returnees to discover whether they killed in the genocide. Some refugees say they fear they will be killed in reprisal if they return.

Zairean army officers at a crossing point into Rwanda five kilometres east of Kibumba said no refugees had arrived by late morning. UNHCR tents for returning refugees were empty.

Shops at the market place in Kibumba were empty and closed.

Western aid agencies have geared up in case of an increase in the small numbers returning to Rwanda voluntarily but say they will not be able to handle a massive, unorganised influx.

Troops plan to stop all movements by refugees into and out of the camps and impose an economic embargo.

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Inefficacy of hanging ropes

EGYPT'S FIRST execution ever of an Egyptian man convicted of a drug-related crime took place Monday with several others awaiting a similar fate. The hanging of the 52-year-old man for possessing heroin with "intent to sell" brings to focus the justice and efficacy of capital punishment in combatting the spread of drugs in Egypt and elsewhere in the world. While there is a near international consensus that the death punishment is not the appropriate way to check drug trafficking and protect people from drug dealers, there are still some countries which continue to view execution as the most effective way to reverse the tide of the illegal trade. This blind belief in the effectiveness of meting out extreme punishment against all those convicted of drug-related crimes was never borne out by corroborated evidence, however. Most, if not all, states which apply the death penalty against drug users or merchants have failed to curtail the problems within their societies even though they enforce this most severe punishment, sometimes on shaky grounds. Many such countries, for example, regard the mere possession of narcotics as enough incriminating evidence to hang a person. The burden in such jurisdictions is wrongly placed on the accused who has to prove his or her innocence.

The history of the drug phenomenon shows time and again how the innocence of unsuspecting young people is repeatedly exploited by hardened criminals whose main profession is to transport this product from one country to another in search of easy and fast financial gain. Under the rules of so many states which are overzealous in their campaign to fight the narcotics trade, the presumption of innocence until proven guilty is compromised and continuously repudiated in contravention of international norms.

Jordan's policy and practice in this area of crime prevention has set a fine example for never applying the death penalty on drug-related crimes which do not lead to homicide even though our laws allow for the enforcement of this unusual punishment on such offences. We believe that other countries whose legislation still allows for the application of capital punishment and do apply it must reconsider their policy in light of the overwhelming evidence about the injustice and ineffectiveness involved. Likewise, countries that do have but do not enforce laws that allow for the death penalty are also called upon to reconsider their legislation. Jordan may wish to walk that extra mile by completing, what it has already done in practice, amending its laws on drug-related crimes. We say this even though we share the wide belief that the drug trade is a global problem that still awaits resolution, hoping that efforts towards this goal will employ more education than hanging ropes.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

A WRITER for Al Ra'i daily said that the sanctions on Iraq have been affecting all the Gulf states too because they have been exposed to Iranian assault and Iranian occupation of the Gulf islands and conspiracies like those which fuelled the disturbances in Bahrain. Husni Ayesh said that the world powers which advocate the continuation of the sanctions have an interest in continuing their domination of the Arab Gulf states and draining their resources, but the Arab Gulf states themselves have no national interest in that; and are unaware of or too weak to deal with this situation and are victims of their own doing. The Gulf states are even afraid to sever diplomatic relations with Tehran despite the latter's hostile actions against them, continued to writer. In the absence of Iraq from the political, economic and military scene, Iran has a free hand in the Gulf, but once Iraq is free, it can contribute to the stability of that turbulent region, said the writer. One cannot expect a weak Iraq to think of democracy or protecting other Arab countries or contributing towards the stability of the region, he added. The Gulf states he said, should realise that Iraqis are there to stay and that the western powers cannot and will not help them fend off or liberate their islands or other parts of the Arab homeland.

A WRITER for Al Ra'i criticised state and private universities for giving priority to non-Jordanian teachers in employment and urged the Ministry of Higher Education to intervene and work out a mechanism that would ensure the employment of Jordanian teachers and professors. Nowadays, Jordan abounds with people with doctorate degrees who cannot get employment in any of the country's universities, said Ahmad Arafat. Academics employed by Jordanian universities include a large number of non-Jordanians whose specialisations can be found in this country, argued the writer. It is the duty of Jordanian universities to prepare and execute plans that would guarantee sufficient numbers of teachers with doctorate degrees capable of filling the positions now taken by foreign professors, and it is their duty to help reduce the volume of unemployment rather than aggravate the situation, demanded the writer.

Washington Watch

By Dr. James Zogby

Clinton's strategy for reelection in 1996

I WAS invited to a meeting with President Bill Clinton last week in the White House residence. In all, there were fifteen people at the meeting, most of whom were ethnic leaders from across the U.S. We had came to discuss with the president ideas and themes for his 1996 reelection effort.

The ninety-minute session gave us an extraordinary opportunity to engage the president in a dialogue, to present our views and concerns on a variety of issues and to learn how he is working to shape the national debate in this critical election year.

Mr. Clinton is an engaging and brilliant thinker, as was recently attested to by none other than Republican speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, with an ability to absorb a tremendous amount of information. What is most striking is the president's ability to distill data from a conversation and formulate detailed policy options — creating workable solutions to complex and chronic problems. What he has found frustrating, of course, is the difficulty of implementing these policies in a situation where Republicans control both houses of Congress and Democrats are themselves divided.

In a briefing prior to the meeting, officials in the 1996 Clinton-Gore reelection noted that in their views this was the most critical election facing America in the past fifty years. This assessment, of course, is based largely on the effects of the Republican takeover of Congress in November 1994. Since then the Republican leadership has attempted, with some success, to dramatically reduce the role of government in domestic affairs — most notably by ending federal regulation and reducing government funding for a wide range of programmes in education, social welfare and health care.

Should Republicans maintain control of Congress and gain the White House in November of this year, their efforts to continue and complete their "revolution" would be uncontestable. Democrats believe that the effects of such an action would be devastating to the poor, the elderly, the environment and the economy as a whole. For the president, it is therefore a question of two fundamentally different views of America that will be competing in November of 1996.

Clinton is the first sitting Democrat in over fifty years who will not face a primary challenge. As such, his reelection strategy will follow the model established by Ronald Reagan in 1984, who also ran unopposed in his party primary that year.

Having successfully stopped other Democrats from creating divisive primary challenges, the White House then proceeded to render the president's financial position unassailable. Instead of allowing fund-raising efforts to drag on into the campaign season, the Clinton-Gore 1996 leadership laboured to complete that task before the beginning of this year. By December 1995, the Clinton-Gore reelection campaign had raised almost all of the $25 million it was permitted to raise under federal elections. laws. Then came the forging of the image the reelection team wanted to project during the campaign.

Mr. Clinton's determined stand on Bosnia, despite weak public opinion support and in the face of strong opposition in some quarters, significantly enhanced his status as a leader, as did his firm stand against Republican efforts to include tax cuts so large that they required deep cuts in programme spending as part of their approach to a balanced budget. The president's stand on this latter issue helped rally and unify the ranks of the Democratic Party so that even some of his Democratic antagonists in the Congress have come to see him, as one of them dramatically put it, as "the Democrats' last protector in front of the gate of hell."

At this stage, without having to fend off a primary challenge, the Clinton reelection strategy is to fight complacency among his supporters, build a strong grassroots base of volunteers in every state, and not directly engage his Republican challengers.

While the president will make some campaign appearances in key states to increase the Democratic turnout on primary day, he will not directly confront the members of the nine-man Republican field. Until later this year, he will not be candidate Clinton, but will remain president Clinton — focusing on the broad themes laid out in his State of the Union address, working to craft solutions to the ongoing debates with Congress over the budget, welfare and immigration reform, health care, and projecting American leadership in areas of the world where American interests are at stake.

While Republicans engage in a bloody intra-party battle, Democrats will observe without comment. It is no secret, however, that Democrats today are feeling better about their chances in 1996 than at any other time during the past three years. Several factors have contributed to their optimism, including:

- the extremely high negative ratings of House speaker Newt Gingrich;
- the success of the president's strategy, thus far, in the budget debate with the Republican Congress. By agreeing to a balanced budget while demanding less of a tax cut, which he argued would necessitate too extensive cuts in programmes for the elderly, the president has won strong public approval;
- the president's State of the Union address was, by all accounts, a success and stood in sharp contrast to the stiff response offered by Republican presidential candidate, Senator Robert Dole; and
- the sudden emergence in the Republican primary of millionaire Steve Forbes, who has vigorously attacked Mr. Dole and created chaos in the overall Republican campaign.

Mr. Dole had hoped to finish off his opponents easily and early, so that by March he would emerge unscathed and begin his campaign against President Clinton. Given Mr. Forbes' rise and Pat Buchanan's new-found strength, it now appears that even if Mr. Dole wins (as it still seems that he can), it will not be as early as the Republican establishment had hoped, nor will be emerge unscathed. The negative campaigning and deeply divisive Republican campaign will take its toll on the eventual nominee and party unity.

While Republicans have suffered the danger from the kind of unexpected pitfalls that can create havoc in an election year, Democrats are wary of unpredictable factors beyond their control that may cause problems for them as well. Most obvious of these is the "Perot factor". Mr. Perot's Reform Party will appear on the ballot in many states in November. If Mr. Perot runs himself as his party's candidate (as many expect he will), analysts predict that he will siphon votes from the Republican nominee, but if Mr. Perot nominates someone else to run at the head of his party's ticket, Democrats might have some cause for worry.

There is already some concern in the Democratic camp over the fact that consumer advocate Ralph Nader (an Arab American) will appear on the California ballot for president in November. California is a state Mr. Clinton must carry if he is to win reelection, but the Nader campaign will be popular with many liberals in California. If Mr. Nader were to win even 5 per cent of the presidential vote in November, he may jeopardise Mr. Clinton's chances of winning the most important state in the electoral college.

Interestingly, Democrats do not seem as worried about Whitewater or the host of other "mini-scandals" that continue to haunt the Clinton White House. It appears that despite intense Republican efforts to raise questions and focus public attention on Whitewater, the firings at the White House Travel Office, the death of White House Aide Vincent Foster and assorted alleged extra-marital affairs, none of these issues has as yet damaged the president's standing with his core constituency. Some of those matters appear too minor or confusing for the public to understand, while others have lost their shock value.

Voters who support Mr. Clinton do so because in comparing his vision and ideas about the future of America with those of his Republican challengers they have not been swayed by what most regard as partisan Republican attacks. This is not to say that new problems may not appear in the future — but for now Democrats are feeling that they have weathered enough storms to feel confident.

Other dangers lurk just outside of everyday thought and include such possibilities as a violent setback in Bosnia or the Middle East. But here, too, the president and his campaign team have found a new confidence in foreign policy, and in the U.S.' international leadership role.

And so Democrats and the president are, at this point, cautiously optimistic about November 1996. They boast about their record: reducing the growth of the federal budget deficit, helping create new employment, helping passage of a comprehensive anti-crime bill, reducing the size of the federal workforce to its lowest level in 35 years, protecting the environment, supporting free trade and business exports and helping to secure peace in Haiti, Northern Ireland, Bosnia and the Middle East.

Democrats also boast about what they feel is their greatest asset: the president himself. Mr. Clinton is eager to begin his campaign and to challenge American voters with his record, his vision for the future — a non-indeological middle ground that emphasises personal responsibility and free enterprise which at the same time supports the role of a compassionate government that can, when necessary, create opportunity and protect basic values.

In September 1996, the real contest will begin. A Republican nominee will have been chosen to face the president in a race that will most probably also include at least one major independent candidate. The field will be set. And while Democrats are optimistic now, they fully realise that the final race in November could be close. No matter how positive the president's standing versus Bob Dole, his core support has never exceeded 52 per cent.

It will indeed be a critical election, but it will also be closely fought and hard to forget — with or without andmines.

Bosnia hangs over U.S. elections

By Laurence McQuillan
Reuter

MANCHESTER, New Hampshire — With almost eerie symbolism, the first death of an American soldier in Bosnia came as U.S. President Bill Clinton was campaigning in the state that holds the first presidential primary. The fates of both missions are inseparable.

With public opinion polls showing a gradual increase in support for Mr. Clinton as the political election year heats up, the president and his advisors clearly know that a military debacle in Bosnia would dash all his dreams of winning a second term.

Word of the first fatality came as Mr. Clinton was wrapping up a two-day trip to New Hampshire, which on Feb. 20 holds the nation's first presidential primary.

Mr. Clinton faces no challengers for the presidential nomination of the Democratic Party, but had come here to counter some of the Republican criticism of his policies that dominates their debate.

Walking along a street lined with supporters waiving his campaign placards in snow-covered Manchester Saturday, Mr. Clinton was asked about the death of the serviceman, who accidentally stepped on a landmine.

At first Mr. Clinton followed the time-honoured tradition of modern American politicians, pretending not to hear the question and walking away.

A few moments later, Mr. Clinton wheeled around and walked back to the small cluster of reporters he had just ignored.

"I told the American people when we started that the place was filled with landmines," he said almost defensively. "It's our biggest danger and we're going to have to redouble our efforts."

The comments almost made it sound as though Mr. Clinton had been pushed into sending 20,000 U.S. troops into Bosnia by an insistent public. The reality was just the opposite.

Mr. Clinton and his confidants are well aware that American public sentiment, while sickened by the bloodletting in Bosnia, has never been enthusiastic about risking American lives to end it.

Clearly, the Clinton remarks and the campaign setting in which they were delivered did not satisfy the president or his aides.

A short time later, White House officials hurried around reading to reporters a more carefully prepared statement written under Mr. Clinton's name.

Later, against the more presidential and impressive backdrop of Air Force One, Clinton stood in the biting cold and read the more reassuring remarks — in hopes the television image carried into millions of homes would have less political overtones attached to it.

The White House immediately tried to downplay the potential political implications of the peacekeeping mission — mindful that republicans vying for their party's presidential nomination may fuel the issue.

"It is not a day for politics," White House Press Secretary Mike McCurry said. "The president continues to believe it is necessary to continue the mission."

White House political operatives know that the commitment of U.S. troops to the NATO-led peacekeeping force created a politically risky situation during an election contest that continues until November.

"We hope politics will end at the nation's shoreline," said one official, optimistically hoping foreign affairs would be above partisan politics.

Bosnia currently is not an issue in the election. It will stay that way as long as the list of young americans dying in bosnia remains short.

LETTERS

Help for the abused

To the Editor:

I would like to tackle the very serious problem of child abuse. Whether at home, in the streets or in school, these children suffer tremendously.

A workshop is being organised to discuss issues related to child abuse, like the legal dimension and the authorities' approach to complaints.

The participants to the workshop include a lawyer, a police officer, a psychologist, the head of the educational guidance department at the Ministry of Education and 10 mothers.

I believe that such a matter needs all the attention from the authorities and the society at large.

The idea of child abuse is totally repulsive and a painful experience, so, hopefully, children all around the world, and especially in our society, could be helped. We also hope the crime will be dealt with effectively in order to save innocent children the pain of having to suffer it.

The country's laws should be decisive in putting an end to the children's sufferings.

Zeina Shennak,
Amman.

The Jordan Times welcomes letters and contributions from its readers on any subject they wish to tackle. Letters intended for publication, however, should contain the writer's full name and preferably address as well. Names can be withheld only upon request and under special circumstances. Letters are subject to editing. The newspaper is not responsible for the return of unused manuscripts.

It occurred to me ...

By Ali Kassay

The rhyme of the ancient scrivener

One of the most endearing features of Jordan is the way it makes gigantic strides towards development and modernity, while remaining faithful to its noble traditions. One of these traditions that have survived despite the passage of the centuries is the ancient scrivener.

The ancient Scrivener can be seen outside any government office, perched on a folding chair under an umbrella that protects him in winter from the rain, and in summer when the sun is far too sultry and one must avoid its ultra-violet rays, as the song goes. Before him is a collapsible table, a portable typewriter, and, occasionally, a photocopying machine. His function, in the old days, was to serve illiterate citizens by writing down their petitions, or filling their forms, in return for a fee.

Today, in our enlightened days, with illiteracy virtually non-existent among the under-twenty-five age bracket, and with our society boasting one of the highest proportions of university degree holders per capita, we find the scriveners multiplying in numbers rather than becoming an endangered species.

The reason is that government officials, for some inexplicable reason, appear to have no faith in the system of education that is the pride and joy of our country, nor, for that matter, in any other educational system. Even if you have passed your tawjihi (school leaver's exam), thereby satisfying the Ministry of Education that you are, to say the least, literate, and even if you submit evidence that you have boosted this academic accomplishment with a series of university degrees qualifying you, if desired, to design, construct, and operate thermonuclear reactors, or to write odes that make the heavens weep, the official at the information desk, in his infinite wisdom, will persist in considering you incapable of filling out a simple form that requests your name, date and place of birth, and current address. Instead of giving you the form, he directs you to the semi-literate scrivener who sells it to you for a fee decided by himself. The scrivener then insists on filling out the form himself, introducing several spelling mistakes in your name (which, he assures you, do not matter), inventing for you a village of origin since he refuses to acknowledge that anyone comes from Amman, and he even invents a signature for you, with which he adorns the bottom of your form.

Next, speaking with such authority that you find yourself unable to question his instructions, he photocopies your passport, your family log book, your birth and wedding certificates, and masses of documents which you did not even know you possessed, and which, you discover subsequently, were not needed for your application, for 100 fils each photocopy. The ancient scrivener then decides on the value of the stamps which should be affixed to your form, pulls them out of a dilapidated wallet, and saturates them with so much saliva that dissolves away the glue rendering the stamps inadhesive, and he charges you 250% of their price.

The final act is to offer you the completed file and invite you accept his endeavours on your behalf as an act of friendship. Should you entertain the notion of accepting this kind offer and try to take the file you will discover that his hand has attached itself to your papers like limpets to rocks, until he has relieved you of a few more Dinars. Write on.



Drawing of th
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Drawing by E. Ba

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Tell Safut — an Iron Age Ammonite town slowly comes back to life

By Rami G. Khouri

Special to the Jordan Times

After a six-year break, excavations resumed earlier this year at the Iron Age (Ammonite Kingdom) site of Tell Safut, near Sweileh, and firmed up our knowledge of the ancient occupational history of a strategic hilltop settlement that may have spanned over two and a half millennia — from the Middle Bronze Age to the Byzantine period. Tell Safut is also intriguing because of its enormous potential as an Iron Age Ammonite townsite that Jordanians and tourists could easily stop and explore en route between Amman and Jerash.

Though first identified in 1877, and first surveyed by Nelson Glueck and R. de Vaux in the 1930s, it was not excavated until the1980s. The Tell Safut Project, headed by Dr. Donald Wimmer of Seton Hall University (New Jersey, U.S.), has surveyed and excavated the site with the primary aim of learning as much as possible about material culture and daily life in the Iron Age (c. 1200-539 BC).

Tell Safut's long occupational history is due to its strategic location on a hilltop alongside the main ancient (and modern) road north of Amman and also overlooking the fertile lands of the Baqa'a Valley some 300 metres below. The settlement reached its greatest size in the later part of the Iron Age, around the late 10th to 6th centuries BC, when it sat astride the King's Highway, the major communication route between the biblical kingdoms of Ammon and Gilead. Excavations have also uncovered possible evidence of occupation in the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2000-1500 BC) and very solid evidence of occupation — a settlement surrounded by a thick, stone-built city wall — in the Late Bronze Age (c. 1500-1200 BC).

The Late Bronze Age settlement included a red-plastered room that was probably a sanctuary; in it were found a bronze figurine of a seated god, a footed ceramic vessel, and large quantities of barley. The unique deity figurine, with its smiling face, flat crown, and gold-wrapped extended arms, undoubtedly the chief god of the site, must have been a regional Ammonite deity, a local representation of the Canaanite god Baal. Several female counterparts, clay pillar-type figurine heads have also been retrieved from various parts of the site Dr Wimmer notes.

The Late Bronze Age occupation continued into the Iron Age I period (c. 1200-918 BC), but has been attested only in a relatively light manner to date in the architecture and ceramics. In the Iron II period (c. 918-539 BC), the townsite expanded dramatically, outgrew the area enclosed by the former Late Bronze Age town walls, and saw homes and other structures built on an area about ten times the size of the Late Bronze town.

Iron II pottery, mainly from the 8th-6th centuries BC, was found in almost every excavated area. The city wall expanded to the east, and a casemate fortification wall was built along the north side of the settlement, overlooking the central Baqa'a Valley.

The 1995 excavations clarified some aspects of the site's ancient history, but also raised new questions. One feature of the site that is immediately evident to any visitor is the incredible complexity of the architecture. The excavators have repeatedly uncovered walls built above other walls on the fundations of earlier walls and running into transverse walls, often with several doorways that were built, blocked, and reopened and reblocked in various periods. As Dr Wimmer put it rather stoically in a recent interview here with the Jordan Times, "deciphering the architecture has been one of our main challenges, because of the repeated rebuilding and many phases of the settlement."

One Iron Age II building excavated last season measures nearly 13 metres long with a single room nearly eight metres in length, though its function is not yet clear. It shows at least three different construction phases and two different destructions. Jars rims and concentrations of potsherds and basalt pestles him that a series of jars may have once stood along an internal wall of the structure.

Other buildings that also suffered severe destruction damage in the late Iron II period were clearly used for storage of materials associated with food processing and preparation, to judge by the many storage jars found. A large room measuring some 2.5 x 7 metres was used for storage and cooking, as evidenced by a cobblestone pavement area, a tabun (earthen cooking oven) and an associated firepit. In a nearby room, a iron plough was retrieved, along with many "loomweights", though not enough to verify the presence of a loom. Dr Wimmer suggests that we might expand our identification of these loomweights because they may have served other purposes, such as to hold down skins or other materials that covered storage jars.

Three monolithic stones in one room (one still standing upright) suggest that some buildings had two floors (which is very clearly documented at other Ammonite sites such as Tell Jawa, along the southern edge of Amman. The presence of many grinding stones, mortars and pestles throughout the site attests to the agricultural economy and obvious abundance of the settlement, which enjoyed plentiful water supplies and arable land.

Artifacts that were relatively well preserved and tightly sealed into Ammonite levels by the destructions in antiquity will add important new information to our knowledge of local culture in the Iron Age II, when the Ammonite Kingdom was ruled from its capital of Rabbath-Ammon (at Amman Citadel). Many ceramic jars, bowls and other forms included imported Assyrian Palace Ware, "Assyrian" carrot-shaped bottles, and assorted varieties of cups and painted jars; the predominant locally produced wares included jars and bowls and several types of cooking pots that are known from other Ammonite sites in the region. A scarab seal depicts a person offering a sacrifice on an altar, with a stylised sheaf of grain to the left. A Late Babylonian seal impression, pressed into a small lump of clay whose string marks clearly show it was once affixed to a document of some sort, depicts a worhipper with long hair and beard, wearing a long dress or robe and a round cap; he is standing, palms up, either praying or performing some other priestly function, in front of a raised platform on which stand an altar and a fire on an elongated firestand. Another important find was an iron military standard measuring about 24 cm in diameter and originally mounted on a pole.



A general view of the excavation of the Iron Age town at Tell Safut (photo by Charles Carter)

Over five dozen stone ballistics were recovered in 1995 but no other obvious weaponry, suggesting that the site played more of an administrative than a military role. Some signs of social startification also emerged last year, such as better quality architecture and pottery in some quarters of the town. The fact that earlier periods towards the bottom of the site had larger rooms and later periods at the summit had smaller rooms may reflect demographic transformation among the population, with families becoming slighdy smaller with time or extended families dividing into smaller nuclear families that required smaller houses.

Excavations were initiated last year along the east side of the tell to explore an area that was thought to be vulnerable to modern farming or construction plans by the private owner of the land (the Department of Antiquities owns only about one-third of the site). A farmer had already bulldozed some of the lower portions of the site along its east side, and the south side of the ancient settlement had already been sliced off by the construction of the modern road to Jerash. The lower eastern terrace area, alongside the highway and visible at eye-level to passers-by about 1.3 kilometres north of the Sweileh roundabout, "is full of walls running to walls and even alongside walls," Dr Wimmer said, emphasising that the architectural complexity of the domestic areas on the summit also extends to the lower reaches of the site. A small, some would say tiny, lamp known from Persian times, along with other Persian Period fragments, suggests that this more extensive occupation continued well into Persian times (c. 539-332 BC).

One of the exciting prospects at Tell Safut has always been the possibility of finding well preserved Persian Period levels, because this period is very poorly represented in Jordanian archaeology. Dr Wimmer found only traces of a Persian and a Hellenistic presence, not enough to indicate the presence of a settled community. He believes that the site was not inhabited in the Roman period because the entire region was within the Roman imperial defense systems (and thus the small tell was of no strategic value).

During late Byzantine times, however, the summit of the tell was slighdy used, to judge by architectural remains, though the lower reaches of the site had long been abandoned. The main Byzantine and Islamic era settlements had moved away from the tell, probably because it was easier to build a new settlement than to work through many layers of destruction from the Bronze and Iron Ages.

Surveys in the 1980s had identified Byzantine and Islamic pottery concentrations associated with architectural remains to the east side of the wadi, several hundred metres away. Excavations there had also uncovered a white tile floor and a vat with Byzantine pottery, probably the remains of a winery, along with foundation stones for a built structure subdivided into smaller rooms, containing some Late Roman, Umayyad and Abbasid pottery sherds.

The ancient identification of Tell Safut, like most Iron Age settlements, continues to tease scholars and laypeople alike. One possible candidate that has been suggested is the biblical town of Nobah, mentioned in Judges 8:11. Dr Wimmer does not feel he has sufficient evidence to suggest a firm association with any specific ancient site.

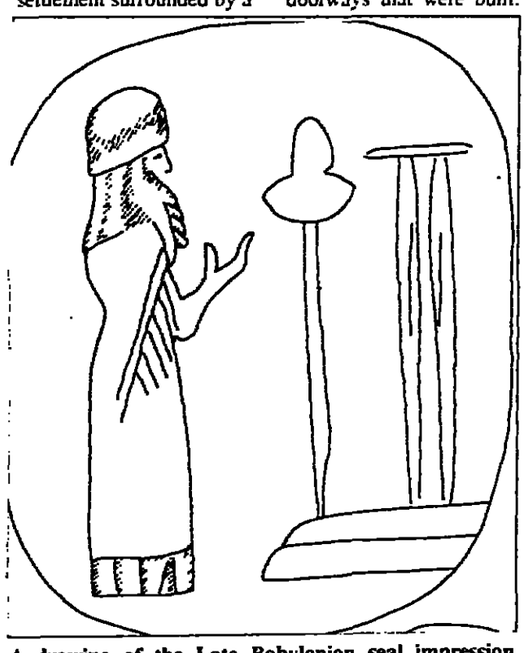
An interesting aspect of the Tell Safut Project is its high-tech component. The field researchers collect many samples of soil and cultural artifacts and take them back for analysis by a team of chemists and other scientists at Seton Hall University. Using sophisticated analysis techniques such as supercritical fluid extraction, gas chromatography and mass spectroscopy, scientists can identify specific substances that may have been stored in vessels from which only some broken sherds remain today, or how a certain soil was used if the soil had been firmly sealed and remained undisturbed in the debris of the ancient settlement. For example, if trace analysis shows evidence of tartaric acid having penetrated an area of soil and nearby pottery vessels, this would indicate that the vessel probably was used to store wine.

Tell Safut is also similar to many other antiquities sites in Jordan, unfortunately, in its vulnerability to illegal excavations and robbing of artifacts. Not only did the Tell Safut Project team find that the site had been repeatedly dug up during their absence between 1989 and 1995, but this year they even discovered that some antiquities thieves had looted parts of the site just two days after the season had ended.

This raises again the question of what does Jordan do with its abundant riches of ancient sites that are usually only partially excavated, and only occasionally fully reconstructed and protected? Tell Safut may offer an opportunity to test the feasibility of consolidating the Iron Age settlement and opening it up to visitors, perhaps even charging a small fee for admission. The site's convenient location and very easy accessibility — it is literally along the side of the Amman-Jerash highway — and its unique potential attraction as a rebuilt biblical Ammonite town could make it feasible for the government or private interests to protect it from looters and natural erosion by turning it into an attraction for Jordanian and international visitors. After all, Dr Wimmer notes, how many Ammonite or other Iron Age towns can a visitor see on his or her way through modern Jordan?

As for the artifacts recovered from the site, graduate students in Seton Hall's Museum Professions training programme at the MA level are reconstructing those vessels that are complete enough to give viewers a sense of whole objects, their purposes and functions, and to prepare an educational exhibit to display them for the public — first at Seton Hall, and then, given enabling funding, hopefully also in a suitable location in Jordan, the permanent resting place of Tell Safut's special objects.

The Tell Safut Project is directed by Donald H. Wimmer and sponsored by Seton Hall University, in cooperation with the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, whose field representative in 1995 was Basem Rihani. Dr. Wimmer gratefully acknowledges support of the project in previous seasons which were funded by Seton Hall University and private funding, especially by Mrs. Helen Galloway and by Jeremiah Kleutsch, whose annuual contributions were matched three times over by his employer, Time Inc. The 1995 expedition was supported in part by a grant from the Catholic Biblical Association. The project director expresses special thanks to Chemistry Professors Petersheim and Snow for their direction and support in taking chemical samples and for conducting analyses that are still being carried out; to Dr. Bernhard Scholz, Provost of Seton Hall University, and to Dr. Ghazi Bisheh, Director General of the Department of Antiquities; to all staff and students; and to the local residents at Safut for their hospitality and assistance.



A drawing of the Late Babylonian seal impression found at Tell Safut, showing a worshipper with upturned hands standing before a fire stand and altar (drawing by E. Barbanes)

Water accord reached

(Continued from page 1)

sea water, but would not include detailed water management.

Although a complete text was not available at press time, Jordanian officials in Amman said that the document was not the awaited regional water charter, and amounted to no more than a cooperative agreement in the areas of exchange of statistical information.

"This is only a text that is really nothing new," said Munther Haddadin, chief negotiator on water issues with Israel. "In my opinion it is not of any importance and it is redundant — it also does not contain any principles that you would expect a regional document to contain."

He said the document lacked principles that would govern water sharing, a mechanism that would make parties adhere to it and that would enforce conservation measures in each of the territories' party to the agreement.

"Nor does it specify the mechanism of conflict resolution," he added.

A regional agreement for water sharing is one of the mainstays of any prospective regional peace as the Middle East's population and development place an ever-increasing demand on a dwindling water supply. Political analysts and regional observers often assert that as the region moves towards peace and stability, one of the single most explosive issues facing the region is water scarcity.

"We have seen other attempts that were much more serious, but they failed as these mechanisms were not included and one party did not adhere," Dr. Haddadin said.

"When all these things are agreed, then it will be a real breakthrough," he added.

The agreement, initialled by representatives to the multilaterals, still has to be ratified by each respective government.

Minister of Water and Irrigation Samir Kawar said he doubted that the region's governments would lend their approval for such a document, especially that Syria is not represented in the working group.

Syria

(Continued from page 1)

travelled to Syria through Jordan.

Syria also has declined an Arab League invitation for the foreing ministers of both countries to meet in Cairo next month, the diplomats said.

Syria and Iraq, ruled by rival wings of the Baath Party, have been feuding for years. Syria was a member of the U.S.-led coalition that drove Iraq out of Kuwait in the 1991 Gulf war.

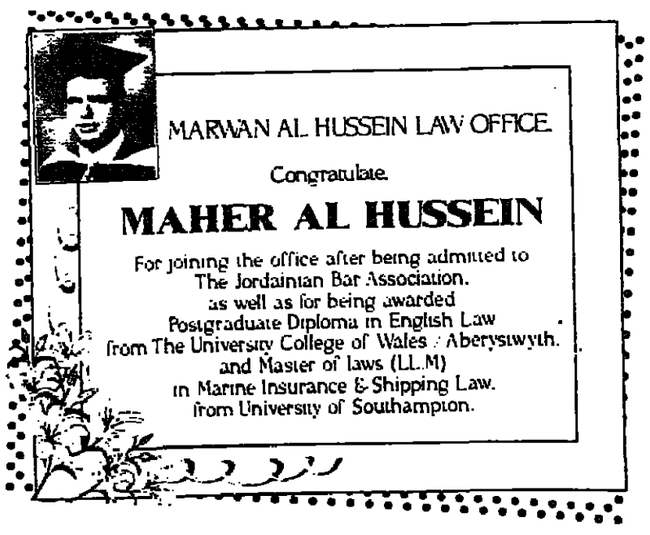
But they have set aside their political differences because they fear Turkey plans to reduce the flow of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers to divert water for massive hydroelectric and irrigation projects.

Savir

(Continued from page 1)

now set for May 28, would influence their progress. He admitted though that "serious gaps" in the positions of the two sides remain.

He denied that Israel was being pressured by the U.S. to arrive at some agreement or declaration of principles as the presidential election campaign got underway in that country. Although any progress on the Syrian track would be considered a foreign policy success for President Bill Clinton and his administration, Mr. Savir said that the U.S. "doesn't view (the Israeli-Syrian talks) with an electoral eye."



Palestinians face employment 'catastrophe', official says

AL BIREH, West Bank (AFP) — The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and Israel need to take urgent steps to redress an unemployment "catastrophe" in the Gaza Strip and provide more jobs to West Bankers, a Palestinian official said Tuesday.

"Our results suggest that drastic changes have to take place and that an emergency plan has to be announced by the PNA to alleviate this problem," said Hassan Abu Libdeh, head of the self-rule authority's Central Bureau of Statistics.

Mr. Abu Libdeh was speaking at a press conference called to release the authority's first survey of employment in the Palestinian territories.

It found unemployment in the Gaza Strip to be at 31 per cent and in the West Bank 13 per cent.

Under-employment, as measured by the number of people holding part-time jobs or jobs less than their skill level, was estimated at 20 per cent in both areas.

The overall Palestinian unemployment rate of 18.3 per cent is noticeably higher than that of Egypt, Sudan, Morocco and other Arab countries, Mr. Abu Libdeh said.

He said Israeli restrictions on the entry of labourers into Israel from the Gaza Strip and the lack of alternative places of employment for the strip's residents had created an unemployment "catastrophe" in the territory.

"There has to be more emphasis on job creation programme by the authority and Israel must agree to absorb more and more of the Palestinian labour force," he said.

Speeding up the building of new industrial zones for Palestinian labourers would also help boost employment, he said.

Meanwhile, Israeli troops imposed a full military closure on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, barring the entry of at least 60,000 day labourers.

Security sources said the measure was taken late Monday on the basis of intelligence information about planned revenge attacks for the killing of a suspected Israeli agents of Hamas militant Yahiya Ayyash, held responsible by the Jewish state for a series of deadly bombings.

An Israeli security official said Israel has taken a decision in principle to gradually increase the number of permits issued for Palestinian day labourers to 100,000. But he added: "If there are terrorist attacks, it will clearly be difficult to do this.

Only 10,000 Gazans work in Israel or on Jewish settlements, compared with 70,000 West Bankers, the survey showed. Israel says that in addition to thsoe granted permits, about 40,000 Palestinians cross illegally for work.

Those employed in Israel earn an average of 83 shekels ($25) a day, nearly twice as much as those who work inside the Gaza Strip, the survey showed.

But the number of working days in Israel was only 13.5 per month due to closures and travel restrictions.

The most common occupation in the Palestinian labour force is crafts (28.5 per cent) with professionals and clerks making up the second largest occupation at 17.3 per cent, according to the survey.

The survey was carried out in September and October among a sample of 7,625 households. No comparative Palestinian unemployment figures were available from last year, Mr. Abu Libdeh said.

Algerians strike over wages

PARIS (R) — Algerian workers started a two-day strike Tuesday to pressure the government to scrap announced wage cuts, Algeria's state-run radio said.

Prime Minister Ahmad Ouyahia said last week that wages of workers earning more than 6,000 dinars ($114) a month would be cut by up to seven days a month for the rest of the year.

The money would be used to pay nearly 200,000 workers employed by debt-ridden state-owned industries who have not been paid for months, he said.

"Now, if the government takes the initiative to cancel its decision related to the salary cut, Wednesday could be a normal day," Algeria's main trade union UGTA leader Abdul Haq Benhamouda said in remarks published in the Algerian newspaper Liberte on Tuesday.

He said the union's demand for scrapping the wage cuts was not negotiable.

EU launches trade offensive

BRUSSELS (AFP) — An offensive aimed at opening up worldwide markets for European companies will be unleashed Wednesday with the adoption by the European Commission of a comprehensive trade strategy paper, officials said Tuesday.

In Paris, Trade Commissioner Leon Brittan said the Commission would launch "a new strategy" and he made particular mention of the United States, complaining that European firms encountered "a network of trade barriers when they try to sell or invest in the American market."

At the heart of the document is an attempt to make the European Union's (EU's) executive arm more effective at identifying and breaking down the barriers which EU companies face when they try to do business in the United States and in the developing markets of Asia or Latin America.

The initiative also represents an attempt by the Commission to win over political and business leaders in the EU's more protectionist states, notably France, to its view that the opportunities created by freer trade will outstrip any disadvantages.

"Free trade is seen all too often as an invitation to foreign companies to penetrate our markets, rather than an opportunity for our companies to increase our exports outside Europe," Sir Brittan, one of five commissioners involved in drawing up the new strategy, told French businessmen.

"It is time to adopt a more offensive market-opening strategy which the French economy and the whole of Europe need," he said.

France is seen as the major internal obstacle to further liberalisation of the EU's trade with third countries. Paris prevented a feasibility study on an EU-U.S. free trade zone from being included in last year's trans-Atlantic action plan and is currently delaying the start of negotiations on the introduction of free trade with South Africa.

But Sir Brittan pointed out that France exported more per head than the United States or Japan, and stood to reach major benefits from a further opening of markets.

The new strategy puts priority on boosting EU exports to the United States.

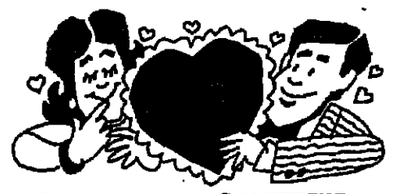
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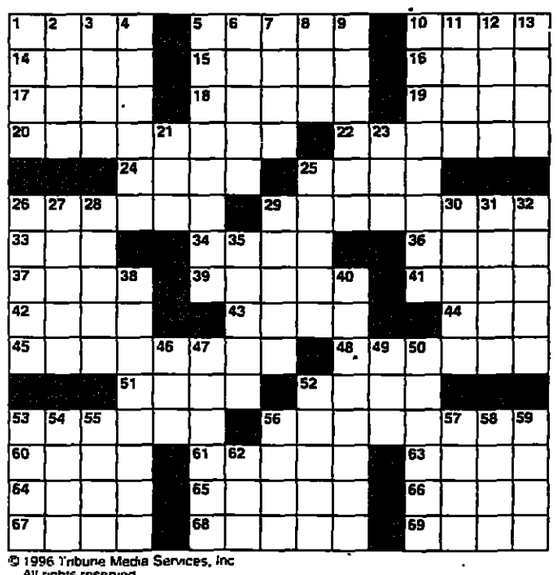


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THE Daily Crossword by Daniel J. Read



ACROSS
1 Worked in the field
5 Tidal bore
10 Wise
14 Otherwise
15 Hawaiian feasts
16 "Star —"
17 Harvest
18 Makes eyes at
19 Artist Magritte
20 Small shop
22 Entertained
24 Customary time
25 Polar explorer
26 Chase
29 Tape holder
33 Single
34 Approach
36 Calabria cash
37 Long for
39 Fortunetelling card
41 Narrow opening
42 Singer James
43 Rajah's wife
44 Cain's mom
45 Junk mail addressee
48 Madison Square —
51 Singer Diana —
52 Lima's country
53 Talisman
56 Topping for pastry
60 Singer Feliciano
61 Withstand
63 Bean or blue beginning
64 Pub drinks
65 Now
66 Fencing sword
67 Warren Beatty film
68 Banish
69 Peruse

DOWN
1 Plant used in medicine
2 Margarine
3 Jacob's brother
4 Innermost part
5 Movingly expressive
6 Soothsayer
7 Strong wind
8 Regret
9 Literary compositions
10 Cheese pastries
11 God of war
12 Movie critic, Siskel
13 — out (made do)
21 Debtor's chit
23 Mama's title
25 Red —, (Snoopy's foe)
26 Strength
27 Join forces
28 Takes five
29 Diamond weight
30 Made mosaics
31 Treasure —
32 Eroded
35 Merits
38 Bald
40 Chatoyant gemstone
46 Deer
47 Landed property
49 Mr. Onassis, to friends
50 Narrow carpet
52 Foot lever
53 Slightly open
54 Underground animal
55 Secondhand
56 Skirt length
57 Stare open-mouthed
58 Eye part
59 Looked at
62 Carton

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Yesterday's puzzle solved

C	O	L	A	■	R	E	B	A	■	E	L	F	I	N
A	M	I	D	■	O	M	A	N	■	N	E	A	L	E
T	A	C	O	■	B	I	N	S	■	T	A	X	E	D
C	H	I	P	P	E	R	J	O	N	E	S	■	■	■
H	A	T	T	E	R	■	O	N	E	R	■	T	R	I
■	■	■	S	E	T	S	■	■	M	I	C	R	O	N
N	A	B	■	P	O	T	A	T	O	C	H	I	P	S
A	S	E	A	■	■	A	I	R	■	■	E	P	E	E
C	H	I	P	P	E	N	D	A	L	E	■	E	S	T
R	E	N	T	A	L	■	■	P	A	L	P	■	■	■
E	N	G	■	T	E	S	T	■	M	A	R	I	S	A
■	■	■	T	H	E	C	H	I	P	M	U	N	K	S
A	S	K	E	W	■	R	E	D	O	■	D	U	E	S
D	R	I	N	A	■	A	R	L	O	■	E	R	I	E
D	O	T	T	Y	■	P	E	E	N	■	S	E	N	T

THE BETTER HALF® By Glasbergen



"My grandmother says hugging is the best form of exercise... it strengthens your heart."

JUMBLE® THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME by Henri Arnold and Mike Argirion

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

LOOGI
VENAH
GROUTH
GUNTOE

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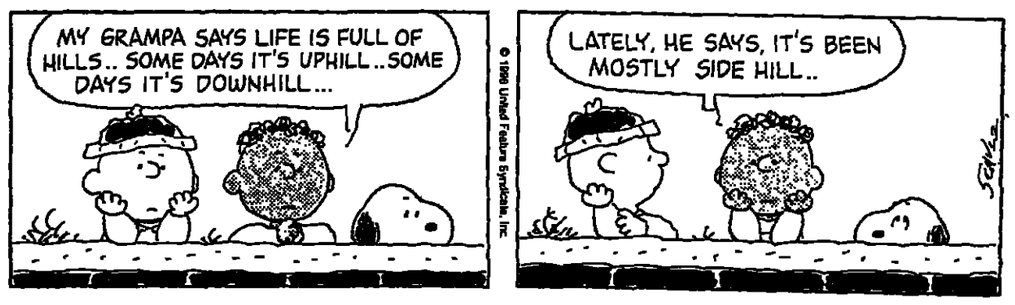
Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Print answer here : "○○○○" ○○○○

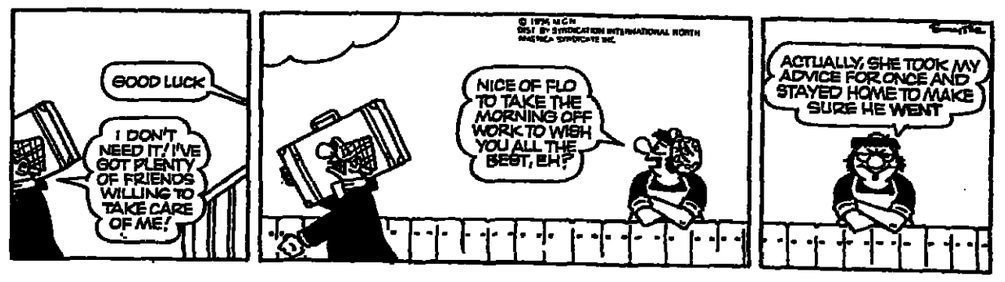
(Answers tomorrow)

Yesterday's Jumbles: GUILE HANDY UNLOCK INVENT
Answer: Another name for the monarch who told tall tales — THE LYIN' KING

Peanuts



Andy Capp



Mutt'n'Jeff

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 1996

By Thomas S. Pierson, Astrologer, Carroll Righter Astrological Foundation

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) You are highly enthused and can get fine ideas and make plans for a more prosperous future for you to make great progress.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Now you understand how to get some plan working in a most successful way, but avoid an easily provoked partner this evening.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) You are inspired just how to gain the wishes which motivate you, but forget tasks this evening which can bring problems.

MOON CHILDREN: (June 22 to July 21) Put that new system to work which will make your career duties much easier to handle. Be sure to get the OK of a bigwig.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) New conditions are now in the offing so accept them and stop adhering to the old and obsolete. Make as many new contacts as you can.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Use a more modern angle in handling business affairs and you get better results. Forget outside visiting and spend time with mate.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) Make new agreements with associates and you can come to a better understanding with them. Don't commit yourself.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Try to find a more modern system for handling your tasks today so, that it becomes easier, faster and more successful.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Partners may have fine ideas which should be listened to and gone along with. Tonight steer clear of any plotting.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Change your attitude at home today and establish more harmony in that vital realm of your existence.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) This is a good day to attend important meetings and keep appointments, but don't expect to get a favour from a bigwig this evening.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) Make a plan so that you can gain more prosperity today. Rest up and do nothing this evening but watch TV or read.

Birthstone of February: Amethyst — Onyx

40 states begin talks to create Middle East Development Bank

CAIRO (AFP) — Delegates from 40 countries began discussions Tuesday on the creation of a bank to finance development of the Middle East in a new era of peace, the Egyptian foreign ministry said.

Experts came notably from the United States, Russia, Japan, Canada, the Arab Gulf monarchies, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria.

The two-day meeting, chaired by U.S. Deputy Finance Secretary Lionel Johnson, was to prepare an "action plan for the task force on establishing the bank's headquarters," Deputy Foreign Minister Rauf Saad told journalists.

The headquarters, to be located in Cairo, should open "in the second half of 1997," he said.

The task force should begin work in Cairo in March "to set the projects for the first three years of the bank," he added.

The second Middle East economic conference held in October in Amman decided to create the Middle East Development Bank to finance investment projects in the region.

In November, an expert commission in Cairo set the bank's statutes and the division of its funds totalling $5 billion, with a start-up capital of $1.25 billion.

The U.S. is the bank's main backer, providing 21 per cent of the capital, with Japan providing 9.5 per cent, Russia six per cent, Italy five per cent and Israel, Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinians four per cent each.

They will each have a representative on the bank's administrative board, which an American will preside over.

The remaining capital is to be put up by the Netherlands, Canada, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Greece, Malta, South Korea, Turkey and Cyprus.

An Israeli foreign ministry official said in November that 25 per cent of the bank's capital had not yet been attributed to a financing country, to leave the door open to European and Gulf nations who refused the project in Amman.

France and Germany proposed creating a fund instead of the bank to study the feasibility of projects then find the best means to finance them through existing institutions.

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ORGANIZED MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR TUESDAY 13/02/1996

COMPANY'S NAME	NO. OF SHARES TRADED	VALUE TRADED JD	PREV. CLOSING PRICE	CLOSING PRICE
ARAB BANK PLC	100	23360	234.000	233.750
JORDAN NATIONAL BANK	1800	7866	4.380	4.370
BANK OF JORDAN	201	713	3.600	3.550
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT BANK	1050	2762	2.670	2.630
THE HOUSING BANK	300	1491	5.000	4.970
JORDAN KUWAIT BANK	1150	3163	2.770	2.750
JORDAN GULF BANK	4988	5086	1.020	1.020
JORDAN ISLAMIC BANK	1920	7317	3.820	3.810
JORDAN INVESTMENT & FINANCE BANK	1050	3603	3.400	3.400
ARIT FINDL SAVING&INVESTMENT FOR HOUSING	250	783	3.010	3.010
ARAB BANK FOR INVESTMENT	39975	32779	.820	.820
PHILADELPHIA INVESTMENT BANK.	1250	1595	1.270	1.280
BANKS SECTOR	53986	90285	INDEX NUMBER: CHANGE	185.86 : -0.24%
JORDANIAN ELECTRIC POWER	37030	58464	1.730	1.740
JORDAN NATIONAL SHIPPING LINES	300	771	2.610	2.570
NATIONAL PORTFOLIO SECURITIES	100	158	1.590	1.580
ARAB INTER. FOR INVESTMENT & EDUCATION	100	346	3.460	3.460
PETRA PRIVATE UNIVERSITY	300	345	1.160	1.150
UNIFIED CO. FOR ORGANIZING LAND TRANS.	6450	14256	2.220	2.220
SERVICES SECTOR	39280	71362	INDEX NUMBER: CHANGE	125.54 : -0.12%
THE JORDAN CEMENT FACTORIES	7066	25717	3.650	3.650
JORDAN PHOSPHATE MINES	500	1575	3.210	3.150
THE ARAB POTASH	1000	5730	5.710	5.730
JORDAN PETROLEUM REFINARY	1182	11746	9.960	9.930
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL MANUFACTURING	2879	12685	4.400	4.420
JORDAN DAIRY	2966	7178	2.420	2.420
JORDAN PAPER & CARDBOARD FACTORIES	120	450	3.830	3.750
DAR AL DAWA DEVELOPMENT & INVESTMENT	1860	13299	7.200	7.150
LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	7000	3780	.540	.540
ARAB PAPER CONVERTING & TRADING	950	1369	1.430	1.420
NATIONAL STEEL INDUSTRY	450	729	1.620	1.620
NATIONAL INDUSTRIES	250	245	.970	.980
JORDAN ROCKWOOL INDUSTRIES	1750	1715	1.000	.980
ARAB CENTER FOR PHARM. & CHEMICALS	850	1356	1.600	1.590
UNIVERSAL MODERN INDUSTRIES	10650	31343	3.000	3.000
JORDAN INDUSTRIAL RESOURCES CO.	2000	3720	1.860	1.860
JORDAN NEW CABLE COMPANY	1650	2145	1.310	1.300
WI-TAY READY WEAR MANUFACTURING CO.	16300	47189	2.900	2.890
INTERNATIONAL TOBACCO & CIGARETTES	1950	2652	1.360	1.360
INDUSTRIAL SECTOR	61153	164601	INDEX NUMBER: CHANGE	123.67 : -0.19%
GRAND TOTAL	154426	326228	INDEX NUMBER: CHANGE	134.80 : -0.21%
NO. OF TRADED SHARES IN PARALLEL MARKET	:	101679		
VALUE TRADED IN PARALLEL MARKET	:	84243		

Sales fever hits Baghdad amid hopes of oil-for- food deal

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Sales fever has hit Baghdad after a reduction in consumer goods prices caused by the recovery of the dinar against the dollar and fuelled by hopes of a partial lifting of trade sanctions on Iraq.

All over the capital, restaurants, hotels, shops and theatres are offering cut prices deals, vying to tempt the thousands of shoppers suddenly able to afford goods again after five years of crippling sanctions.

"Come and buy fabric at 3,000 dinars a metre of silk. It's almost free!" cries an old man on television, giving the address of a shop in the centre of Baghdad.

Each night Iraqis gather around their television sets to listen to the long list of companies advertising their sales in a mini-consumer boom that has followed the government's decision to discuss an oil-for-food deal with the U.N.

Since Iraq agreed on Jan. 19 to hold talks on accepting a formula to allow limited sales of oil to help pay for humanitarian needs, the dinar has risen from 3,000 to the dollar to just 450 at the official bank rate.

In the wake of the national currency's spectacular recovery, restaurants are offering cut prices iftar, the meal which Muslims eat at dusk to end their day-long fast during Ramadan.

Hotels, patronised mainly by young couples unable to travel abroad because of the embargo, are reducing tariffs by half, as is a theatre where a popular satirical play about the country's plight is showing.

The streets of the Iraqi capital, choked with shoppers trying to pick up new clothes before the 'Eid Al Fitr feast marking the end of the fasting month of Ramadan on Feb. 20, are decorated with banners announcing the latest reductions.

"Even with the sales, the prices are still high for us," said Umm Rasha, a mother-of-three leaving a fabric shop.

The sick have also benefited with the health ministry halving the cost of medicine and medical care. Farmers, meanwhile, have profited from a 50-60 reduction in the price of pesticides.

Private transport companies have halved their fares, a week after public transport tickets were cut.

In less than three weeks, the prices of groceries has fallen by at least half, while the state company producing dairy products has reduced the price of milk, yoghurt and cheese by 75 per cent.

For Iraqis, the reductions are a sign of optimism that their country and the United Nations will reach an agreement in New York on a deal to partially lift the embargo imposed after Iraqi invaded Kuwait in August 1990.

The negotiations, which have taken place in a "positive amtosphere," resumed Monday after a suspension over the weekend.

Meanwhile, Arab and foreign businessmen have been flooding to Baghdad in a frantic bid to win contracts ahead of the competition as the prospect looms of a partial lifting of a U.N. oil and trade embargo.

The Iraqi press said a delegation of Italian and Swiss businessmen left here Monday after holding a series of meetings with the ministers of trade, industry and health.

It was just the latest in a series of visits by foreign delegations all bidding for a share of the market should Iraq accept a U.N. oil-for-food deal.

According to press reports, the Italian-Swiss delegation discussed the "needs of Iraqi companies for basic materials" mainly in the areas of "electricity, the food industry, pharmaceuticals and textiles."

The head of the delegation, Prince Victor Emmanuel of Savoy, quoted by the press, said: "We hope the next time we come to Iraq the embargo will have been lifted and the situation will be back to normal."

The daily Al Thawra hailed the visits under the banner headline: "International companies hope to resume their activities in Iraq."

The French employers organisation, the Conseil National du Patronat Francais (CNPF), has announced a delegation of French businessmen will visit Baghdad in the spring.

French firms have kept up contacts with Iraq despite the embargo imposed after Baghdad's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, with an eye to an eventual easing or lifting of the sanctions.

The CNPF said French firms were mainly interested in Iraq's "food needs," while andofficial from the water company Lyonnaise des Eaux, Jerome Monot, told Iraqi television his firm had won a U.N. dispensation to carry out a project to clean up Baghdad waters.

Russia, which was one of Iraq's major trading partners before the invasion and the subsequent 1991 Gulf war, has also stepped up efforts in the past two yeas to ensure it has a foothold in Iraqi markets.

On Feb. 7 the two countries signed an oil cooperation accord setting out an exchange of technical information and visits of experts.

And even though relations between Iraq and Jordan have been strained since top-level Iraqi defections to Amman in August, Jordanian businessmen have been in Baghdad since Friday on a mission to boost ties.

LONDON EXCHANGE RATES

LONDON (R) — Following are the buying and selling rates for leading world currencies and gold against the dollar on the London foreign exchange and bullion markets Tuesday.

One U.S. dollar	1.3726/36	Canadian dollar
	1.4756/66	Deutschemarks
	1.6516/26	Dutch guilders
	1.2036/46	Swiss francs
	30.34/38	Belgian francs
	5.0773/23	French francs
	1568.4/9.9	Italian lire
	106.82/92	Japanese yen
	6.9480/80	Swedish crowns
	6.4430/80	Norwegian crowns
	5.7034/34	Danish crowns
	1.4150/60	Singapore dollars
	0.7534/39	Australian dollars
	7.7317/27	Hong Kong dollars
One sterling	$1.5340/50	
One ounce of gold	$403.00/403.50	

BUSINESS

A review of news from the Arabic press

Workers want better salaries, protest dismissal of colleagues

☆☆ THE LABOUR dispute between the management and employees of the Jordan Dairy Products Company has been referred to the Ministry of Labour to resolve the conflict and take the appropriate decision. As such, the strike and work stoppage that was planned for Tuesday (yesterday) was avoided until further notice. The workers are protesting the dismissal of 15 colleagues and the rejection of the management to consider improving the "conditions" of the employees.

At the Cairo Amman Bank, bankers and employees in the insurance and accounting sectors staged a token warning strike this week in front of the bank's downtown branch to protest the management's sacking of a number of workers at the Cairo Amman Bank and other institutions. The head of the bankers' association said more strikes and sit-ins would follow in front of the Arab Land Bank and the headquarters of the Cairo Amman Bank to pressure their managements to return the dismissed workers.

Also voicing their objections were the workers in the mining sector who rejected the JD 5 salary increase given by the Jordan Phosphate Mines Company. The phosphate company employees considered the increase very low and does not meet the needs to face the high living cost. The employees said that there were 40,000 workers and their families waiting for the board of directors to decide fairly on their demands.

Another complaint of low wages was presented by the head of the association of workers in the spinning and weaving industry to the management of the Middle East Textile Industries Company. He urged the company to improve the "conditions" and "living circumstances" of workers in light of the prevailing economic situation and the large drop in purchasing power which has made their income short of meeting their basic requirements (Al Dustour).

Chicken shortage over — official

☆☆ THE SHORTAGE in broiler chicken in the market ended yesterday (Monday), the secretary-general of the Ministry of Supply said, noting that some improvement was emerging in the local market after releasing large quantities of frozen chicken held at the ministry's coolers for the account of Al Dleil company. He indicated that the situation was also improving due to farmers selling poultry aged more than 55 days as feeding costs were not proportionate with the selling price differential. The secretary-general emphasised the need to protect farmers by maintaining high customs on imported frozen chicken. "If there is a shortage of a product at a certain time does not mean a need to shift the general policy towards that product," the official stressed (Al Aswaq).

Abdul Jaber: Accord with EU will reduce JD 40m from customs revenue

☆☆ JORDAN IS expected to lose JD 40 million annually from customs tariff when the Kingdom signs a partnership agreement with the European Union (EU) by mid-1996, Taysir Abdul Jaber, former minister and economist, said recently in a lecture. He added that the sales tax would be the basis to compensate for that loss noting that the commodities exempted from customs would be subjected to the sales tax. Dr. Abdul Jaber expressed hope that the private investments from the European Union would increase pointing out that Tunisia has at present 877 joint investment projects with the European Union. The economist pointed out that the tourism sector would witness a major positive leap from this agreement and predicted that the government revenue will sharply increase especially when the government cadres will be reduced, not only from a relative angle but in absolute terms.

Dr. Abdul Jaber urged the government to work for a free trade agreement with the United States and a free trade accord with neighbouring Arab countries as Jordan sells 40 per cent of its exports to these countries. He noted that Israel has a free trade agreement with the United States and Palestine and, as such, there should be no reason for not having a free trade agreement with the U.S. He indicated that countries smaller than Jordan have agreements on free trade with the U.S., such as Cyprus, because these accords open a wider market for exports and provides a wide range for foreign investment.

JORDAN MARKETPLACE

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JORDAN MARKET PLACE

Financial Markets — Jordan Times in co-operation with Cairo Amman Bank

Central Bank of Jordan Exchange Rate Bulletin
Date: 13/2/1996

Currency	Bid	Offer
U.S. Dollar	0.7080	0.7100
Sterling Pound	1.0821	1.0875
Deutsche Mark	0.4800	0.4824
Swiss Franc	0.5887	0.5916
French Franc	0.1395	0.1402
Japanese Yen*	0.6631	0.6664
Dutch Guilder	0.4288	0.4309
Swedish Krona	------	------
Italian Lira*	0.0450	0.0452
Belgian Franc	------	------

* Per 100

Other Currencies — Date: 13/2/1996

Currency	Bid	Offer
Bahraini Dinar	1.8620	1.8750
Lebanese Lira*	0.044250	0.044650
Saudi Riyal	0.1870	0.1895
Kuwaiti Dinar	2.3070	2.3670
Qatari Riyal	0.1938	0.1945
Egyptian Pound	0.2080	0.2100
Omani Riyal	1.8350	1.8410
UAE Dirham	0.1926	0.1933
Greek Drachma*	0.2785	0.3045
Cyprus Pound	1.4865	1.5465

Eurocurrency Interest Rates — Date: 13/2/1996

Currency	1 MTH	3 MTHS	6 MTHS	12 MTHS
U.S. Dollar	5.06	5.00	4.87	4.75
Sterling Pound	6.00	5.93	5.87	5.81
Deutsche Mark	3.12	3.00	3.00	3.06
Swiss Franc	1.31	1.44	1.69	1.75
French Franc	3.68	3.68	3.68	3.87

1st Division Basketball Championship

Jazireh, Watani meet today

JBF postpones Ahli-Orthodoxi match

By Aleen Bannayan
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Al Jazireh and Al Watani Wednesday play the last of their matches of the First Division Basketball Championship which has only one more match to go before the 1995 season is completed with the Ahli-Orthodoxi clash on the weekend.

Al Jazireh, the surprise team of the tournament, seriously challenged both top teams and enlivened the competition by entering the race for title. After finishing third for the third consecutive year they now meet last-placed Al Watani in a match that will have no effect on both teams' standings.

Al Watani are last after losing all their matches but will maintain their place in the prestigious division after Al Abassi became the only team to be relegated when they withdrew prior to the competition.

Al Jazireh settled for third after squandering their chance not only of advancing to second but probably of winning the championship.

Although represented by their Under-22 team, they appeared to be serious contender after losing to Al Orthodoxi 72-66 in the first round. However, that loss seemed to have given them the reason to take matters seriously as they realised they could have done better. Consequently Al Jazireh scored the tournament's biggest upset in years when they beat title-holders Al Ahli 76-73 in their first round encounter.

Al Jazireh had the biggest chance to advance to second when they faced Al Orthodoxi in the second round. After leading throughout most of the game Al Jazireh seemed unable to hold on to their lead while their opponents were not about to give up easily otherwise they would have finished third. Al Orthodoxi therefore put up a big effort and managed to win 85-75.

Nobody expected Al Jazireh to give Al Ahli a hard time in their second round match especially after it became well-known that Al Ahli had been having administrative differences when they lost to Al Jazireh in the first round.

Al Ahli therefore seemed to be taking a comfortable lead in the first half but Al Jazireh soon caught up and after winning the first half took a ten-point lead and seemed able to win the match. But again their players could not hold on to their lead and Al Ahli avenged their first round defeat by winning 77-73.

Al Orthodoxi now lead the standings on score difference after scoring a big 115-41 over fourth placed Al Jalil.

THE JORDAN BASKETBALL FEDERATION (JBF) has decided to postpone the first division's final match between Al Ahli and Al Orthodoxi to take place Saturday, Feb. 17, instead of Thursday Feb. 15 because of changes in the schedule of the final week in soccer's Premier League Championship.

JBF spokesman Mohammad Nabil Hassan Tuesday told the Jordan Times that the decision to hold the match Saturday was seen as the "best solution" after the soccer federation Monday changed its schedule and stuck to their decision although the basketball match was scheduled two months.

The change in schedule of both federations was forced after the Jordan Soccer Federation decided to hold the Baqaa-Wihdat match Thursday night instead of Tuesday Feb. 13. Al Wihdat will be crowned champions if they win.

A minimum number of 10,000 fans are expected to attend Al Wihdat's match at Al Hussein Youth City's Stadium which is adjacent to the Sports Palace Court where the basketball match would be held. Officials therefore anticipated the Sports City to be packed if the two highly awaited matches are held at the same time Thursday, thus warranting a change in schedule.

STANDINGS

	P	W	L	SF	SA	PTs
Orthodoxi	7	6	1	672	448	13
Ahli	7	6	1	680	442	13
Jazireh	7	4	3	518	444	11
Jalil	8	2	6	417	570	10
Watani	7	-	7	406	709	7



Australian women's 100 metres beaststroke world record holder Samantha Riley protests her innocence to a press conference in Brisbane February 13 after she tested positive for the banned drug dextropropoxyphen at the world short course swimming champs in Rio de Janeiro last December (Reuters photo)

Riley pleads innocence

BRISBANE (AFP) — Australia's drug-tainted world record holder Samantha Riley Tuesday declared she was not a cheat, despite being found to have taken a prohibited substance before her record-breaking swim at last year's world short-course championships.

"I am not a cheat," she told a news conference here. "I support FINA (swimming's governing body) 100 per cent in their stand against drugs and drug cheats, but I am not one of those."

A distressed Riley hopes FINA will treat her leniently, despite the prospect that she could face a two-year ban.

No decision has yet been announced.

Riley tested positive for a banned substance contained in a painkiller at the world short-course championships in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, last December, where she set two world records.

The drug, dextropropoxyphene, is on the International Olympic Committee's banned list, but doctors say it is not a performance-enhancing substance.

Her lawyer, Peter Baston, said Tuesday Riley might have to wait up to another 48 hours for FINA's decision, which could threaten her bid for gold medal glory at this year's Atlanta Olympics.

The 23-year-old Queenslander spoke Tuesday for the first time since the probe into her alleged drugs breach was made public.

Asked what she hoped for, she said: "I hope that I have a fair trial and they see something that has happened innocently and as a mistake.

"At the moment, I am only trying to be very positive.

Australian Swimming's executive director, Vena Murray, said Monday Riley took the tablet after complaining of a headache during the championship's opening ceremony — two days before her first swim.

It is understood Riley tested positive after setting a world record in the 200m breaststroke on day two of the championships, but was negative just a day later when she clocked another world mark in the 100m breaststroke.

Riley said she was not concerned about lasting the world record she broke at that meeting.

"I don't mind too much about the world record. The most important thing for me is competing in Atlanta."

Riley's coach, Scott Volkers, who gave her the tablet, said he made his error in judgement after Riley suffered seven days of headaches.

"I made probably the biggest error of my career," Volkere said Tuesday.

"We exhausted a lot of different avenues and it was late one night after the opening ceremony.

"She was still complaining of headaches and I said that I'd get her a headache tablet.

"Stupidly enough, I reached into my bag and grabbed the only tablet that I had."

Volkers said the tablet given to Riley, which can normally be obtained only under prescription, was his wife's.

NBA commissioner gets extension worth reported $35 million

SAN ANTONIO (R) — The National Basketball Association's executive board approved a contract extension for commissioner David Stern on Monday reportedly worth $35 million over five years.

Stern recently finished a five-year, $15 million deal that was sweetened by a $10 million bonus.

The $7 million annual salary would easily be tops for a sports commissioner and surpass all but a handful of players in the league that Stern helped turn into a hugely successful worldwide enterprise since taking charge in 1984.

NBA players' salaries have risen from an average of $260,000 to $3 million during the tenure of Stern, a superb marketer of the sport, who helped steer the league clear of labour strife this Autumn.

Skaardal leads Scandinavian sweep

SIERRA NEVADA, Spain (AP) — Veteran Norwegian skier Atle Skaardal took gold Tuesday in the men's Super-G in the World Alpine Skiing Championships, leading a sweep by Scandinavian skiers of five of the first six places.

Skaardal, who has seven career wins in the World Cup including a win this year in super-G, was perfect near the upper part of the course where technique is needed and finished in a time of 1 minute 21.80 seconds.

The win came just a few days short of his 30th birthday on Saturday, the day of the men's downhill in which Skaardal will also race. It was his first gold medal in his eighth appearance in a world championships or Olympics dating back to 1985.

Skaardal missed the '92 Olympics with injuries suffered in a crash in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, and has struggled to get back to top form. This best finish was a silver medal in downhill in the '93 worlds.

It was a great outing for Scandinavia on the second day of the world championships in Southern Spain with five of the six top places going to Norway, Sweden and Finland.

Second went to Patrik Jaerbyn of Sweden in 1:22.09 and third was for Kjetil Aamodt of Norway in 1:22.11. Aamodt is the defending world champion in slalom and giant slalom.

Finland's Janne Leskinen was fourth in 1:22.37, followed by Patrick Wirth of Austria in 1:22.48 and Lasse Kjus of Norway in 1:22.57.

"I was very insecure when I took a look at the course this morning," Skaardal said. "I wasn't sure how to navigate it. But I had a super feeling in the start house and went down without a mistake."



Winner Isolde Kostner of Italy jokingly bites her gold medal during the awards presentation for the women's Super-G race, the first event of the Alpine Skiing World Championships on Monday (Reuters photo)

Computer shakes chess world, then stumbles

PHILADELPHIA (R) — In two heady days over the weekend, a "monstrous machine" — actually an IBM supercomputer — shook the world chess champion before falling to a combination of his imagination and its own technical weakness.

After one victory each in the experiment called Garry Kasparov vs Deep Blue, chess experts and computer engineers following the six-game match in Philadelphia believe machine has not overcome man. At least not yet.

"Each year, the ratings of chess (computer) programmes have steadily gone up and up and up," said international master David Levy of England. "And for a number of years now people have speculated about when will be the day that a programme is strong enough to beat Garry Kasparov."

In game one on Saturday — the first contest between a chess computer and a reigning world champion under regular tournament conditions in which players have hours to plan strategies — that day appeared to have arrived. The machine that can calculate 80 million to 120 million positions per second swept away the player believed to be strongest in chess history.

"You have a sleepless night after playing against a computer in a game like this," said the Russian grandmaster, who recovered to win Sunday's second game.

"The number of moves this monstrous machine can calculate prevents it from making a positional mistake within reach of its calculation," said Kasparov, 32, who had vowed to depend human dignity against the machine. "It's the first time that we're playing not just with a simple computer but with something that has its own intelligence."

In the contest that is partly a project on how computers solve complex problems and partly a battle between man and machine, the programmers said they learned more on Sunday than they did on Saturday.

"The first game was not particularly helpful because there were no obvious errors," said Murray Campbell, one of a team of scientists who developed the programme over six years. "The second game was better because of the errors... it got into an opening it had never played before somehow and we don't know why yet."

Some of the more than 200 paying spectators at the Philadelphia convention centre were awed by Deep Blue's fearless opening victory, while the humans in the IBM control room jumped for joy.

"I'm a computer guy and I've been explaining to my friends for years that the mathematics say the computer has to eventually win. With the technology, it's a foregone conclusion," said spectator John Cook of Philadelphia.

Deep Blue, a play on big blue, the nickname of International Business Machines, was making its public debut as part of 50th anniversary celebrations of the association for computing and machinery. Interest in the weekend games was so high that several million people worldwide followed moves on the internet page HTTP://WWW.IBM.PARK.ORG and other sites.

Researchers from IBM in Yorktown heights, New York, developed a processor chip specifically for chess calculations. Deep Blue is now a 32-node IBM RS/6000 SP high performance computer. The black-cased computer includes two linked modules, each standing 6-1/2 feet (2 metres) tall.

Kasparov, who offered his intelligence to the project at a price of $400,000 if he wins and $100,000 if he loses, congratulated the Deep Blue team for giving him such a difficult time so far.

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF & TANNAH HIRSCH

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WEEKLY BRIDGE QUIZ

Q. 1 - As South, vulnerable, you hold:

♠K6 ♡AJ9542 ♢KQ4 ♣Q2

The bidding has proceeded:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1♡	Pass	2♠	Pass
2♡	Pass	2♠	Pass
2NT	Pass	3♠	Pass
?			

What do you bid now?

Q. 2 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:

♠QJ7 ♡AKQ10762 ♢A83 ♣Void

The bidding has proceeded:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1♡	Pass	1♠	Pass
?			

What do you bid now?

Q. 3 - As South, vulnerable, you hold:

♠K104 ♡6 ♢AK102 ♣AK983

The bidding has proceeded:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
4♡	Pass	Pass	Dbl
Pass	4♠	Pass	?

What action do you take?

Q. 4 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:

♠Q872 ♡K10 ♢AK ♣AKJ73

The bidding has proceeded:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1♠	1NT	Pass	Pass

What action do you take?

Q. 5 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:

♠10652 ♡98762 ♢Q83 ♣6

The bidding has proceeded:

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1♠	Pass	Pass	1♡
2♢	Pass	?	

What action do you take?

Q. 6 - As South, vulnerable, you hold:

♠Q10543 ♡J854 ♢7 ♣A102

The bidding has proceeded:

EAST	SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
1♡	Pass	Pass	1NT
Pass	?		

What action do you take?

Williams-Renault unveil new Formula One car

ESTORIL, Portugal (AFP) — The Williams Renault team unveiled here on Monday the 1996 Formula One car for World Championship favourite Damon Hill and his new teammate, Indycar champion Jacques Villeneuve.

Hill gave the car its first test minutes after predicting" a very hard fought season" with competition more widely spread than in recent years.

Runner up for the past two years to champion Michael Schumacher, Hill has been installed as pre season favourite for 1996, in what is widely seen as the car with the most potential, and the most powerful and reliable engine.

Schumacher starts afresh with Ferrari, for whom Villeneuve's father the late Gilles drove, which has to develop a brand new V 10 engine.

"If I am favourite," Hill said, "then I wouldn't say it's by a big margin, because I think the competition is going to be very close."

He listed that competition as Schumacher, Gerhard Berger and Jean Alesi in Benettons with Renault engines identical to his, possibly his former teammate David Coulthard and Mika Hakinen in the McLaren Mercedes, unveiled here Sunday, and very definitely Villeneuve.

"While Jacques has a lot to learn about Formula One, he is certainly very quick," said Hill. "He is already a champion in his own right and winner of the Indianapolis 500, and he is certainly intending to make his mark.

"There will be challenges from all directions this season," Hill said.

Villeneuve left no doubt about his intentions. "I'm racing because I want to win. I definitely won't be content to settle for second. I'm a competitive person in whatever I do and always want to try to beat everybody."

It would definitely be a "straight fight" with Hill, he said. "It's important to win. And it's almost more important to beat your teammate than anybody else. It's sad, but there it is," he said.

Asked if he thought he could beat Hill, Villeneuve said: "Anyone is beatable."



British driver Damon Hill (left) of Williams-Renault jokes with his new teammate Canadian Jacques Villeneuve (right) during a photo session at Estoril (Reuters photo)

While agreeing he had a lot to learn about Grand Prix racing, Villeneuve said he had "a winning car and a winning engine" and noted he was arriving with strong credentials, not from a junior formula.

"We've done close on 9,000 miles testing to make sure we are not just at the first race, but racing," he said.

While the McLaren was completely new, the Williams FW18 is a direct evolution of the 1995 FW17B, said chief designer, Adrian Newey.

"We have taken the FW17B which was a competitive car, and refined and developed it to a higher level, while meeting the new regulations," he said.

Jordan Phosphate Mines Co., Ltd.

re announces the invitation to tender No.: 2F/96

JPMC re announces the invitation to bid No. 2F/96 **(for the supply of 1000 metric tons of ammonium nitrate)**

The tender documents are available at JPMC offices in Amman, Supply Department, until 2.00 p.m. local time Sunday 18th February 1996. Application for documents should be accompanied by a nonrefundable fee of JD (100) for each set of tender documents

The closing date for submitting bids is 12.00 hours local time Saturday 24 February 1996.

Sameh Madani
Managing Director

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Shows: 12:30, 2:15 ,6:45, 8:30, 10:30

CINEMA TEL: 677420
CONCORD
CONCORD "1"
On Deadly Ground
Shows: 12:30, 2:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30
CONCORD "2"
* Jim Carrie
Shows: 2:30, 6:15

AMMOUN THEATRE & CINEMA/TEL: 618274 - 618275
Adel Imam & Yusra in Birds of Darkness (Arabic)
Shows: 12:30, 3, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30

Nabil & Hisham's Theatre
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Welcome Normalisation
Shows: 8:30 p.m.
For reservation call 625155

Early Dani goal sinks Tottenham

LONDON (R) — Portuguese international Dani scored within five minutes of making his first full appearance for West Ham to earn them a 1-0 Premier League win at Tottenham on Monday.

His close-range header was set up by West Ham's other new boy, Croatian centre-back Slaven Bilic.

Danny Williamson's corner fell to the unmarked Julian Dicks, whose 12-metre volley was instinctively pushed up into the air by goalkeeper Ian Walker.

Before the Tottenham defence could regroup, the powerful Bilic had applied a glancing header and Dani pounced to nod the ball into an empty net.

Two breathtaking saves by goalkeeper Ludek Miklosko denied Spurs and equaliser in the opening minutes of the second half.

First, Miklosko spread himself courageously to block Teddy Sheringham's fiercely struck close-range effort and then he stretched out a long leg to stop a goalbound Chris Armstrong shot.

Italian Cup semis start today

ROME (AP) — The Italian Cup semifinals feature four markedly different clubs, from second-division Bologna to high-flying Fiorentina, second in Serie A.

Bologna hosts Atalanta of Bergamo Wednesday night in one semifinal first-leg, and Fiorentina is at Internazionale of Milan Thursday.

Bologna, bidding to become the first Serie B team to claim the cup in 33 years, already knocked off first division leader AC Milan in the quarterfinals.

The team makes up for a weak attack with a tight defence and could give Atalanta trouble. The Bergamese won't have suspended veteran defender Gianluca Luppi, but striker Sandro Tovalieri will return from a three-week absence with a sprained right knee.

Bologna midfielder Andrea Bergamo is out hurt.

while Bologna is tied for fourth in Serie B with a good shot at promotion, Atalanta has lost seven of eight league matches and dropped from fifth to 18 Serie A clubs to 12th.

Atalanta won the Italian Cup in 1963, as a Serie B club.

By defeating third-place AC Parma 1-0 Sunday in league play, Fiorentina solidified its status as Milan's chief challenger.

"We weren't even able to enjoy that win, because we already have another important game at the doorstep," said defender Daniele Carnasciali.

Fiorentina is led by Argentine striker Gabriel Batistuta, second in Serie A with 14 goals, and Francesco Baiano (eight goals).

Inter has recently discovered its own one-two attack punch in Marco Branca (11 goals) and Maurizio Ganz (nine), who each scored twice in a 4-0 defeat of Napoali Sunday.

Ondruska secures S. Africa's Davis Cup win

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) — An inspired performance, from Marcos Ondruska in the deciding singles of the World Group Davis Cup tie gave South Africa a 3-2 victory over Austria here Monday.

Ondruska made sure that his country heads for either Rome or Bari and a quarter-final meeting with Italy through an emphatic 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 destruction of Austrian Gilbert Schaller.

"I thought I'd just come out positive and that's what I did," said Ondruska, who had lost in straight sets to Austrian and world No. 1, Thomas Muster in the opening singles.

There was no thought of him losing against Schaller, a late replacement for Wolfgang Schranz, who pulled out with a stomach ailment.

In the reverse singles, Wayne Ferreira became Muster's second victim in singles play, losing 5-7, 7-6 (7-5), 4-6, 6-7 (7-4).

"It just didn't feel right," said Ferreira. "I had been practising hard for a match on grass."

It was a match that never happened after the opening singles had been shared 1-1, rain caused the abandonment of most of Saturday and all of Sunday's play and the tie to be moved indoors.

Earlier, South Africa had taken the lead in what was to prove a critical doubles.

Ferreira and Gary Muller downed Muster and Alex Antonitsch 6-3, 7-6 (7-2), 6-7 (7-5), 3-6, 6-3 in a nail-biting five setter.

With Ferreira losing to Muster, the stage was set for Ondruska.

"I knew no matter what happened to Wayne (Ferreira) I was going to come with positive," Ondruska said.

Indeed he did, ensuring a South African victory and the meeting with the Italians on April 5-7.

Collated first round results

World Group

In Rome: Italy beat Russia 3-2
In Plzen, Czech Republic: Czech Republic beat Hungary 5-0
In Jaipur, India: India beat Netherlands 3-2
In Geneva: Germany beat Switzerland 5-0
In Katrineholm, Sweden: Sweden beat Belgium 4-1
In Besancon, France: France beat Denmark 5-0
In Johannesburg: South Africa beat Austria 3-2
In Carlsbad, California: United States beat Mexico 5-0

Asia/Oceania Zone Group One:

In Christchurch: New Zealand beat China 4-1
In Yokkaichi: Japan beat Philippines 5-0
In Melbourne: Australia beat Taiwan 3-0 (reverse singles not played)
In Jakarta: South Korea beat Indonesia 4-1

Asia/Oceania Zone Group Two:

In Hong Kong: Hong Kong beat Sri Lanka 5-0
In Bangkok: Thailand beat Iran 4-1

American Zone Group One:

In Nassau: Bahamas beat Peru 3-2
In Santiago: Brazil beat Chile 3-2
In Valencia: Venezuela beat Canada 3-2

American Zone Group Two:

In Montevideo: Uruguay beat Guatemala 5-0
In Bogota: Colombia beat Puerto Rico 5-0
In Cojimar: Cuba beat Paraguay 3-2
In Guayaquil: Ecuador beat Barbados 5-0

Euro/African Zone Group One:

In Tel Aviv: Israel beat Norway 3-2

China to take part in Atlanta Olympics

BEIJING (Agencies) — China said Tuesday it plans to take part in the Olympic Games this summer in the United States, despite reports it was considering a boycott over the attendance of Taiwanese leaders.

"So far I have seen no circumstances that would lead to China's abstention from this grand sporting event," foreign ministry spokesman Shen Guofang said at a twice-weekly media briefing.

Wu Shaozu, head of the state physical culture and sports commission, reportedly hinted last week that China would stay away from the Atlanta Games if Taiwanese leaders showed up.

Dick Pound, an executive board member of the International Olympic Committee, said in London the Taiwanese would not be invited.

China claims Taiwan as a province and has been locked in a tense struggle to cow the island into submitting to Beijing's sovereignty. Taiwan is ruled by the nationalist party, which turned the island into a fortress after losing a civil war to the Communists in 1949.

North Korea in Olympic qualifiers

In Tokyo North Korea entered six players Tuesday for Asia's table tennis qualifying round for the Atlanta Olympic Games, its first show of interest in international sport in three years.

The entry in the March 26-28 tournament in Chiba, near Tokyo, was made in a fax message from the North Korean table tennis association to its Japanese counterpart.

The six players are three women and three men, including Kim Song-Hui and Li Gun-Sang who took part in the 1992 Barcelona Games. They will be accompanied by two coaches and two officials.

Seven men and seven women from Asia will travel to the Atlanta Games this summer.

North Korea, which has shunned international sporting events since mid-1993, only signed up for the Olympic Games last month. Its entry means all 197 national Olympic committees will participate in the centennial Olympic Games.



Namibia's Frankie Fredericks (centre) sprints to a new indoor 100-metre world record of 10.05 seconds during the international indoor track and field event in Tampere Feb. 12. Norway's Geir Moen (right) was 2nd and Sweden's Peter Karlsson (left) placed fourth. Fredericks beat the previous best of 10.13 seconds set by Nigerian Olapade Adeniken in January of last year (Reuters photo)

Fredericks sets world indoor best

TAMPERE, Finland (Agencies) — Frankie Fredericks of Namibia sprinted to a men's 100 metres world indoor best of 10.05 seconds at an international athletics meeting on Monday.

In his first indoor race over 100 metres in official competition, Fredericks, 28, shaved 0.08 seconds off Nigerian Olapade Adeniken's previous world best over the distance, which is seldom contested indoors.

Adeniken ran 10.13 seconds in January last year.

Fredericks, world champion over 200 metres at Stuttgart in 1993, twice Olympic silver medallist at Barcelona in 1992 and 200 metres runner-up at the Gothenburg World Championships last year, has clocked 9.95 seconds over 100 metres outdoors.

In Tampere's Pirkka Arena Fredericks left Norwegian Geir Moen, the 200 metres world indoor champion in 1995 and European champion over 200 metres in 1994, far behind. Moen finished second in 10.31.

Peter Rono, the Kenyan veteran who captured the 1,500 metres Olympics gold medal at Seoul almost eight years ago, confirmed his comeback when he easily outpaced the field to triumph over 1,000 metres in two minutes 21.05 seconds.

In the women's 60 metres final, Jamaican Merlene Ottey, 35, easily beat Zhanna Pintusevich of Ukraine.

Ottey, heading for her fifth Olympics this year, clocked 7.13 seconds, 0.03 slower than in Madrid last week.

Bailey beats jet

In Maebashi, Japan, Canadian world sprint champion Donovan Bailey shrugged off jet lag for an easy victory in the men's 60-metre race at Gunma international indoor athletics meet here on Monday.

Bailey, the winner of the 100-metre in Gothenburg last year and also the indoor 50-metre world record holder, clocked 6.59 seconds to beat Americans Kareen Street-Thompson by 0.02 seconds and Henry Neal by 0.04 seconds.

"I just landed yesterday and I have a little jet lag, but it was a good competition. I'm in a very good shape right now and I'm glad I came here and won," said the Canadian.

When asked about his hopes at the Atlanta Olympics, Bailey simply said: "I think my aim is just the same as everyone else — to win the gold medal."

Sixteen men's and women's events were held at the Green Dome in Maebashi, northwest of Tokyo, with some of the world's top athletes taking part.

The 400-metre hurdle world champion Derrick Adkins defeated fellow American Jose Parrilla to win the 60-metre race in 1 minute 17.21 seconds, while world indoor 110-metre hurdle record holder Colin Jackson of Britain won the 60-metre hurdle in 7.51.

World shot put champion John Godina of the United States was an easy winner in the event throwing 21.00 metres, ahead of Ukrainian Yurij Belonog's 19.43-metre.

In the women's competition, world silver medallist Letitia Vriesde of Suriname won the 60-metre. Olga Shishigina of Kazakhstan edged past Michelle Freeman of Jamaica to win the 60-metre hurdle, and Huang Zhihong of China won the shot put.



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King Fahd still not fully recovered despite chairing cabinet meeting

By Suleiman Nimr
AFP

MECCA — King Fahd of Saudi Arabia has not yet taken back the full reins of power despite chairing a cabinet meeting here for the first time since his illness in November, political sources said Tuesday.

They said the 74-year-old king, who was shown on television presiding at the weekly meeting of ministers and chatting with several of them late Monday, still needed more rest before re-assuming his powers.

The king delegated the running of the kingdom to his half brother, Crown Prince Abdullah, on Jan. 1, pending his recovery from the illness which kept him in hospital for a week.

Diplomats and Western doctors said he had suffered a blood clot on the brain, although officially his illness was due to overwork.

Political sources said his chairing of the cabinet meeting did not mean he had returned to full duty as he still needed rest, but it was the beginning of his recovery.

The television pictures showed him appearing in good health, though he was leaning on a stick.

"He must not tire himself out because of the state of his health," said one source, who added that the king's appearance was "the start of his rehabilitation but the Crown Prince will continue to take charge of the state."

Before the cabinet meeting in Mecca, 1,000 kilometres west of Riyadh, the monarch received a large number of princes of the royal family, ministers and Saudi dignitaries.

King Fahd was, as usual spending the last 10 days of the fasting month of Ramadan at the Al Safa palace adjoining the esplanade of the mosque in Mecca, Islam's holiest city.

For the past week, Islamic leaders have been making a mini-pilgrimage to the city and many more are expected to visit before the end of Ramadan, due around Feb. 20 depending on sightings of the moon.

The sultan of Brunei, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and His Majesty King Hussein have been among the 500,000 foreign visitors crowding into Mecca (see page 2 story).

The VIPs here for the mini-pilgrimage, or Omra, are housed in luxurious guest palaces near the Kabaa, Islam's most venerated building traditionally held to have been built by Abraham.

Their visits to the grey stone cube, draped with a black curtain, and their other movements in the city are carefully organised by the Saudi authorities.

According to the Koran, all Muslims with sufficient means have to make the full pilgrimage or hajj — which lasts several days and take place this year at the end of April — at least once in their lifetimes.

But according to a declaration by the Prophet Mohammad, the Omra can count as a pilgrimage if it take place during Ramadan.

Thus, Mecca, a city banned to non-Muslims, is swamped with thousands of pilgrims hoping to make a quick trip and avoid the intense heat and huge crowds that accompany the Hajj. The streets are choked, the hotels and apartment blocks full.

Saudi television reported that the cabinet had reviewed the work of enlarging the mosques at Mecca and the holy city of Medina, at a total cost of 70 billion riyals ($18.5 billion).

It quoted the king as saying it was Saudi Arabia's duty to continue to provide every comfort for the two million Muslims who come on pilgrimage every year.

However, he failed to meet King Hussein and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak when they came here last weekend. The king has not received any foreign visitors since his illness.



MINISTER SWORN IN: **Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Khaled Madadha Tuesday takes the oath of office before His Majesty King Hussein at a special ceremony held at Al Nadwa Palace. The oath taking ceremony was attended by Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti and Royal Court Chief Awn Khasawneh. Mr. Madadha was abroad when the new Cabinet took the oath of office early this month (Petra Photo)**

Farrakhan praises Iran, denounces U.S.

TEHRAN (AP) — Black American leader Louis Farrakhan denounced the U.S. campaign against Iran Tuesday and said he could be imprisoned with convicted Islamic terrorists like Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman when he returns home.

In an interview on Tehran radio's English-language service, he said: "Maybe there's a cell next to Abdul Rahman for me; and maybe he and I will be together reading the Koran and encouraging each other."

Sheikh Abdul Rahman, a blind Egyptian Muslim cleric, was sentenced to life imprisonment by a U.S. court Jan. 18 for conspiring with others to blow up New York City landmarks and to kill Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

"America feels that a person like that... who is listened to and loved, as Imam Abdul Rahman was, needs to be confined" when he preaches "the message of true Islam, which inspires the militants among us as Muslims," Mr. Farrakhan said.

"So that leads me to myself. When you see in America nearly 2 million black people answer a call by Louis Farrakhan, I'm in deep trouble inside America."

Mr. Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam movement and the first black American leader to visit Iran, arrived Saturday to attend celebrations marking the 17th anniversary of the 1979 Islamic revolution which overthrew the pro-Western monarchy.

He said pressure for change in U.S. foreign policy, which seeks to isolate radical states such as Iran, Libya, Iraq and Sudan, must be brought to bear on Washington from within and without.

Black Muslim activists must learn from the Jewish lobby in the United States "which has achieved great leverage, even though there are only six million Jews" there, he said.

"Well, we're over 40 million inside America... If we have strategic alliances with the native Americans and the Hispanic Americans, and we learn how to use our power as the Jewish people use their power, then from inside America we can free you outside," he said.

Mr. Farrakhan denounced "the thought of revolution in terms of a gun; that's stupid. The real revolution must take place with the Koran... and change the American mind. Then we can change America's domestic policy... America's foreign policy."

Earlier, the state-run television network showed him telling Iran's 270-member parliament Tuesday that he plans to use the unity of Muslims in the United States to fight Washington's anti-Iran policies.

On Monday, the official Islamic Republic News Agency quoted Mr. Farrakhan as saying during a visit to the holy city of Qom, south of Tehran, that the United States, "as the only superpower, is on the decline and Islam will attract more adherents as the supreme and inspiring power."

Bahrain pledges to crush anti-government riots

MANAMA (R) — Bahrain on Tuesday pledged to crush anti-government riots and put an end to acts of sabotage.

"There is no place for terrorism on the land of this country," Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifa Ben Sulman Al Khalifa said after visiting the Diplomat Hotel which was rocked on Sunday by a home-made bomb.

"We are determined to confront riots and sabotage acts to maintain security and stability and to preserve the peoples' achievements," Sheikh Khalifa said in remarks made available to Reuters.

Sunday's blast, blamed by officials on "terrorists," was the second to hit a hotel in less than a month and the third in the capital Manama since Dec. 31.

"These sabotage acts increase our determination to reject the group of saboteurs. The strong support Bahrain has received from inside and outside the country is a certificate of defeat to the terrorism," Sheikh Khalifa said.

At least 13 civilians and three policemen were killed in Muslim Shiite-led protests which first erupted in December 1994 and died down in April.

Anti-government riots resumed last month, demanding the restoration of a parliament dissolved in 1975 and the release of "political prisoners."

Three weeks ago eight Shiite leaders, including Sheikh Abdul Amir Al Jamri, an influential clergyman and a former member of parliament, were arrested. A prominent Sunni Muslim lawyer, Ahmad Al Shamlan, was arrested last week.

The nine were accused of inciting the latest protests.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel-Syria talks pushed back to Feb. 28

TEL AVIV (AFP) — The next round of Israeli-Syrian peace talks will begin at the Wye Plantation outside Washington Feb. 28, two days later than originally announced, the Israeli foreign ministry said Tuesday. Ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor said the delay was due to "technical problems." Israel Radio reported that the start of the negotiations had been pushed back by a scheduling problem at Wye Plantation, a resort and conference centre in rural Maryland east of Washington. Israeli and Syrian negotiators have held three rounds of U.S.-brokered negotiations at the Wye Plantation since resuming their peace process in December after a six-month freeze. The new session, expected to last two weeks, will take place during campaigning for early general elections in Israel. Israeli officials have said little progress is expected during the electoral period on the key issue of Israel's withdrawal from the Golan Heights, which it seized from Syria in 1967. The elections, originally scheduled for October, are now due to be held on May 28 or June 4.

Palestinian charged in Germany for hijack

HAMBURG (R) — A Palestinian mother of one has been charged for her part in the hijacking of Lufthansa passenger aircraft nearly 20 years ago and for killing the German pilot, her lawyer said on Tuesday. Souhaila Andrawes, 42, has also been indicted on two counts of attempted murder as one of a team of four Palestinian guerrillas who hijacked the plane of holidaymakers in 1977, her lawyer Hajo Wandschneider told Reuters. Mr. Wandschneider said that a date had not been set for the trial due to open in Hamburg. Germany's federal prosecution office in Karlsruhe declined to confirm the charges, but said that it would make a statement on Wednesday. She is the sole survivor of the four hijackers who commandeered the jet to back demands by West German leftist guerrilla group the Red Army Faction (RAF) for the release of 11 of its members jailed in Germany.

Sudanese policy reckless, foolish — Egypt

CAIRO (R) — Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Musa described Sudanese policy as reckless and foolish on Tuesday and said he hoped Khartoum would extradite three men wanted for trying to kill Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Mr. Musa suggested that U.N. sanctions could be in store for Sudan if it fails to meet a Security Council request that it hand the three Egyptians over to Ethiopia, where the assassination attempt took place in June last year. "I call on Sudan to abide by the Security Council resolution ... so that the Sudanese people do not face any problems," he told a parliamentary committee. "The Sudanese government must not escalate the situation, to avoid an escalation of the U.N. measures," he added.

Iran, Iraq draw up 'definitive' PoW lists

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran and Iraq have drawn up "definitive" lists of PoWs and the missing from their 1980-1988 war, an issue which has blocked normal ties between the two neighbours, officials said Tuesday. Ali Khorram, an adviser to Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati, told the newspaper Iran that the lists would be exchanged at the border the same day. But he did not report any concrete progress on settling the issue. Mr. Velayati said on television the lists were now "definitive" and the exchange would take place during a meeting of a joint committee set up last year.

2 militants killed in police raid

CAIRO (AFP) — Police killed two Muslim militants in a raid on their hideout in the southern province of Sohag on Tuesday, interior ministry sources said. Police stormed the hideout in Al Zouk Al Gharbi village, 500 kilometres south of Cairo late Tuesday and in the firefight that followed two militants were killed, the sources said.

Algiers bomb toll rises to 20 dead

PARIS (R) — The death toll from two car bombs that exploded in Algiers on Sunday has risen to at least 20, an Algerian newspaper said Tuesday.

The body of a woman was dug from the rubble of a town hall where one bomb was detonated on Sunday morning at the Muslim stronghold of Bab Al Oued, and a man later died of injuries sustained in the blast, the newspaper Al Khabar said.

Algerian authorities have said 41 people were injured, including seven seriously, in the town hall bombing.

At least 18 people were killed and 52 hurt by a car bomb six hours later outside a press centre in Belcourt district where the country's major newspapers are based.

Three newspapermen from the evening French-language daily Le Soir d'Algerie were killed.

Officials and journalists identified them as Allaoua Ait M'barak, editor of Le Soir d'Algerie, Mohamed Dorbane, a columnist, and Djamel Derraz, a writer for the leisure section.

Le Soir d'Algerie's building took most of the blast from the explosion which devastated the press centre, they said.

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) condemned the bombing and urged the government to rescind censorship of independent reporting on the country's civil strife.

"The CPJ... today condemned yesterday's bombing of a press centre in Algiers," it said in a statement received on Tuesday.

It said the killings brought to 57 the number of journalists killed in Algeria since May 1993.

"The continuing terrorist campaign against journalists and the Algerian government's censorship policies put the press in an untenable position. Journalists who face a constant threat of assassination by terrorists are put even more at risk by being forced to print government propaganda as news," it added.

U.N.-Iraq talks to continue

UNITED NATIONS (AFP) — The first round of U.N.-Iraq talks on an oil-for food deal neared conclusion Tuesday as an Israeli minister warned that Saddam Hussein must be prevented from rising like a "nuclear phoenix from the ashes" of Gulf war defeat.

U.N. spokeswoman Sylvana Foa, quoting U.N. chief negotiator Hans Corell, said that technical talks which began here Feb. 6 had ended for the day and would resume Wednesday morning.

Ms. Foa's statement came as the U.N. Security Council presidency said the council expected to be briefed on the negotiations in the next two days.

The technical talks here are focusing on the implementation of U.N. Resolution 986, which provides for Iraq to export one billion dollars worth of oil per quarter in return for food and medicine.

If successful, the U.N.-Iraq talks would lead to the first partial lifting of sanctions against Iraq. The country has been under a harsh sanctions regime since invading Kuwait in 1990.

U.N. Security Council presidency spokesman James Rubin played down a comment by a U.S. official on Monday that a council briefing on the talks would be held in the event of a "significant breakthrough." He said that the end of a round was the "proper moment" for the council to be updated.

Earlier Monday, Israeli Foreign Minister Ehud Barak met with reporters after talking to representatives of the U.N. Special Commission, which is monitoring Iraqi disarmament under U.N. resolutions.

Mr. Barak said the international community must ensure that Iraqi leader "Saddam Hussein would not reemerge as a nuclear phoenix from the ashes of his defeat" in the 1991 Gulf war.

He expressed concern that "any loosening of the sanctions will provide them with the resources which might help them go ahead with other non-conventional activities."

But U.S. Ambassador Madeleine Albright said later that the Security Council had drafted Resolution 986 "very carefully" to ensure that "the funds created by the oil sales will go to the right places" and would serve humanitarian purposes only.

'Bosnia peace jeopardised by delivery of war crimes suspects'

SARAJEVO (AP) — NATO's delivery of two Serb military officers to the custody of a U.N. war crimes court gravely threatens the accord that ended 42 months of war, Bosnian Serbs cautioned Tuesday.

The two Serb officers, arrested by the Muslim-led Bosnian government, were taken Monday to a prison in the Hague, Netherlands, where the U.N. war crimes tribunal will question them and decide whether to have them stand trial.

"This is a dangerous precedent," said Velibor Ostojic, a senior figure in the Bosnian Serb hierarchy. "All this gravely jeopardises further implementation of the peace agreement."

Although strongly worded, their statement stopped short of threatening retaliation.

The tribunal, which has only one of 52 indicted Bosnians in custody, will decide "sooner rather than later" whether to charge the Serbs, tribunal spokesman Christian Chartier said.

The government's arrest of General Djordje Djukic and Colonel Aleksa Krsmanovic on Jan. 30 provoked the first major crisis since peace took hold in Bosnia two months ago.

The Serbs retaliated by breaking off all ties with the NATO-led force implementing peace and Bosnia's federation of Croats and Muslims.

Although Serb civilian officials later said they would cooperate with NATO, ties with the federation continue suspended, and it remained unclear Tuesday whether the Serb military would follow the civilian example of restoring links with NATO.

Col. John Kirkwood, a NATO spokesman, called cooperation with the Serbs "spotty." He was unable to provide a single instance of recent contact between senior Serb authorities and NATO officials.

The Bosnian Serb delegation did not show up Tuesday in Vienna for a meeting on reducing the arsenals of the former warring factions.

NATO peacekeepers took Gen. Djukic and Col. Krsmanovic in a convoy bristling with guns from a central Sarajevo jail to a stadium on the north side of the city. There, they boarded a U.S. Blackhawk helicopter that flew them to Sarajevo airport for a flight on a military C-130 Hercules transport plane bound for the Hague.

NATO officials said Tuesday that they acted on a request from Richard Goldstone, chief judge of the Hague tribunal.

The Bosnian government accused them in civilian massacres in Sarajevo. Mr. Chartier said the men could also become witnesses in other war crimes cases.

The decision to hand over the two Serbs to the tribunal came after Richard Holbrooke, the U.S. mediator who crafted the Bosnian peace plan, flew to the region to try to resolve the crisis caused by the arrests. He was widely believed to be instrumental in the transfer.

The transfer could ease the heat on the Bosnian government and put it on international organisations, such as NATO and the United Nations, better able to withstand Serb criticism. If the tribunal decides not to charge the two Serbs, the transfer could serve as a vehicle for their release without embarrassing the government.

Mr. Holbrooke also wrested a separate agreement Monday from the government not to arrest any more suspects without the authorisation of the tribunal.

Bosnian army sources say Gen. Djukic is senior enough to possibly provide evidence against President Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia. Mr. Milosevic is widely accused of instigating the war in Bosnia before abandoning his Bosnian Serb proteges and forcing them to accept a deal to end the war.

Mr. Milosevic has not been indicted for war crimes.

Bosnia's ambassador to the United Nations, Muhamed Sacirbey, told Associated Press television that the two officers may have information that "is very sensitive, and could be very damning to both the military and to the political structures in Belgrade," the Serbian capital.

The case of the two Serb officers highlights the difficulties the NATO-led force in Bosnia faces. Officers say they will not go out looking for suspected war criminals, but will arrest them if they come across them in performing other duties.

The Bosnian Serbs are led by Radovan Karadzic and Gen. Ratko Mladic, both indicted on war crimes charges.

In Belgrade, the independent Nasa Borba daily reported Tuesday that a Serbian ultra-nationalist leader and former Milosevic ally has applied for a Dutch visa in hopes of testifying against the Serbian president.

The newspaper quoted Vojislav Seselj, who heads the Serbian radical party, as saying that if he gets the visa, he would visit the Hague even without an invitation from the tribunal.

Meanwhile, in two moves aimed at reducing Serb edginess, Bosnia's parliament adopted a law Monday granting amnesty for all in former enemy armies except war crimes suspects, and UNHCR, the main U.N. relief agency, said it would fund a bus service starting Wednesday between Ilidza and government-held parts of Sarajevo.

COLUMN ONE

use spray to stop pigs squealing

BUCHAREST (R) — Thieves who stole eight piglets used a paralysing spray to stop them squealing, the Romanian state news agency, Rompress, said. Police investigating the robbery said the thieves broke into a farmer's pigsty at night, according to the agency.

Senegal may cancel skier's licence over black-up

DAKAR (R) — Sports authorities in Senegal said they could withdraw the licence of skier Lamine Gueye after he let a blacked-up Italian comic march with him in the opening ceremony of the Alpine Skiing World Championships. "We condemn this attitude and we are looking at whether we shouldn't withdraw his licence," Ousmane Ndiaye, an adviser to Sports Minister Ousmane Paye, told Reuters. Gueye, who lives in Paris, is the sole member of the Senegalese Ski Federation. The west African country lacks either mountains or snow. "He occupies all the posts in his federation by himself," Mr. Ndiaye said.

World's oldest person on disc

MARSEILLE, France (R) — Better late than never. The world's oldest person has cut her first record. Mastering Time, a compact disc in which Frenchwoman Jeanne Calment tells anecdotes about her life, will be released on Feb. 21 on her 121st birthday. Experts declared last October that she was the oldest person whose age had ever been fully authenticated. Mrs. Calment plans to spend the proceeds on a coach so that her friends at an old people's home in Arles can enjoy the Provence scenery made famous by painter Vincent Van Gogh, whom she takes pride in having once met in the last century.

Peasant who wanted to be emperor jailed

BEIJING (AFP) — A peasant who dreamed of becoming China's emperor has been sentenced to eight years imprisonment and four followers have also been jailed, a provincial newspaper reported. The five men were sentenced recently in China's central Henan province, the Henan Legal Daily said. China's imperial system ended in 1911 with the overthrow of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). Xiao Shuyou, 40, was the man who dreamed of becoming emperor and was a peasant brought up by a mentally-disturbed adoptive father, the report said. From 1983, Xiao printed badges and handed out leaflets attacking the Chinese Communist Party around Nanyang in the southwest of Henan, the paper said. Mr. Xiao managed to recruit around 20 accomplices with whom he travelled the whole country, distributing propaganda aimed at overthrowing the Communist state and the socialist system, the report said. The Nanyang Intermediary Court found him guilty of counter-revolutionary propaganda and incitement to counter-revolutionary crimes. His four fellow conspirators were sentenced to terms ranging from two to eight years. The five men accepted the verdict and did not appeal, the paper said.